

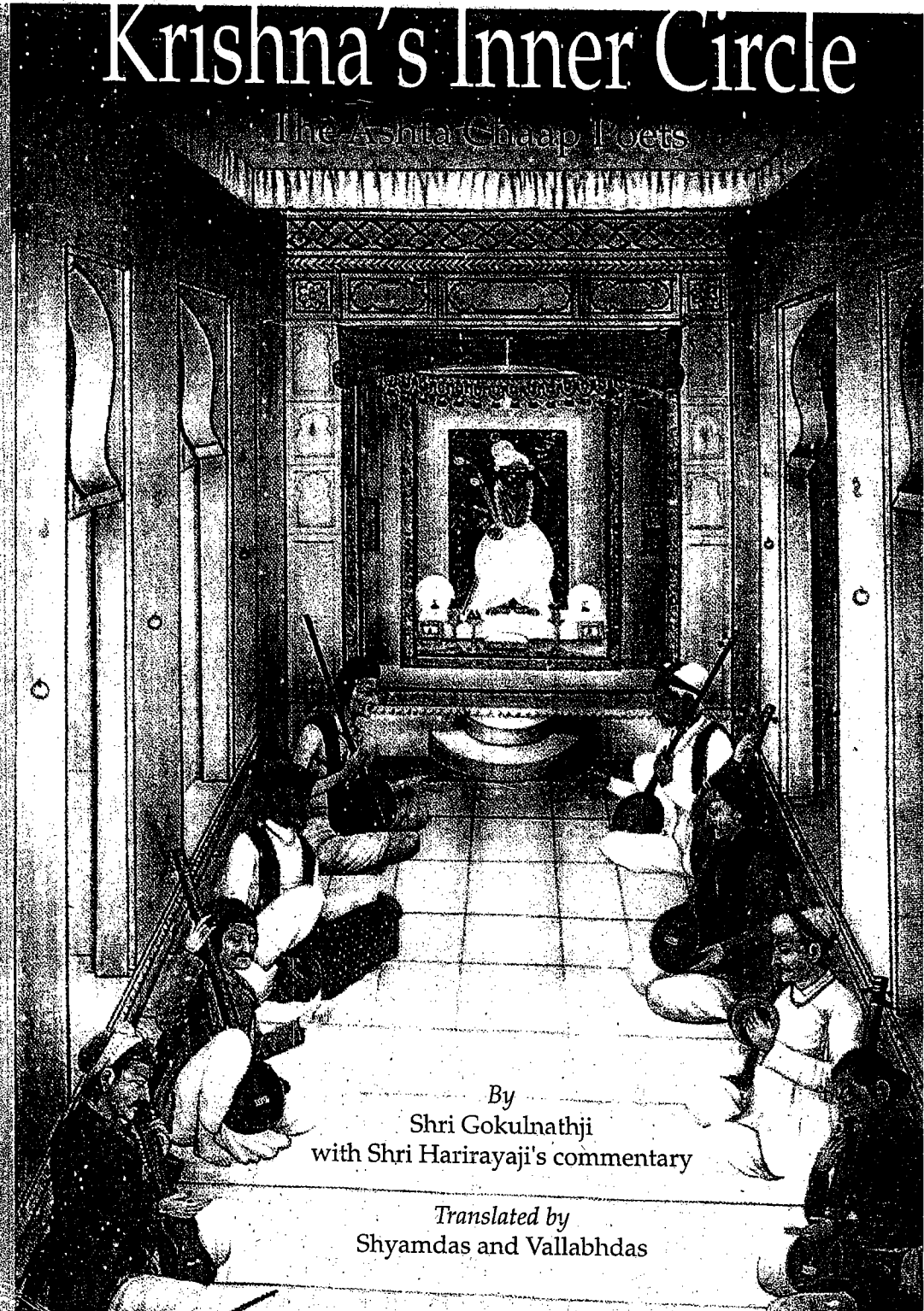
Krishna's Inner Circle

The Ashta Chaap Poets

Krishna's Inner Circle

Chaitanya

Feeth
tion



By
Shri Gokulnathji
with Shri Harirayaji's commentary

Translated by
Shyamdas and Vallabhdas

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2009

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The kirtan poems of the Pushti Marg Shuddhadvaita Sampradaya, and the Ashta Chaap poets in particular, contain all the bhavas (divine moods) and instructions of Shri Vallabhacharya's grace filled path and should be studied, enjoyed and contemplated as such. Scholars and devotees of the lineage are fortunate to have in their midst an accomplished translator such as Shyamdasji – a beloved disciple of my own esteemed father, Nitya Lilasth Goswami Shri Ranchoracharya Prathamesh. My blessings are with Shyamdasji for his successful efforts to bring forth the bhavas of the Ashta Chaap poets into English. My blessings and wishes are that he continue such translation efforts indefinitely into the future.

अवधीय
नो. वि. प्रथमेश

Mahaprabhuji Shri Vallabh- Acharyaji



*And His Four
Ashta Chaap
Poet Disciples*

Shri Gusainji Vitthalnathji



*And His Four
Ashta Chaap
Poet Disciples*



Surdas
(1478 - 1583 CE)



Paramananda Das
(1493 - 1584 CE)



Nandadas
(1533 - 1585 CE)



Paramananda Das
(1493 - 1584 CE)



Kumbhandas
(1468 - 1583 CE)



Krishnadas
(1497 - 1581 CE)



Govindadas
(1505 - 1586 CE)



Chaturbhujadas
(1540 - 1586 CE)

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I humbly bow to all of Shri Vallabhacharya's lineage holders. They naturally contain the Path of Grace within their being. My entrance into this path and humble efforts to translate its literature would not be possible without the blessings and grace of my guru, His Holiness Goswami Prathameshji.

I am also indebted devotionally to the many bhaktas of Vraj: Shri Vishnu Shastri, Shri Mohan Bhattiya, Joshana Ben, Jetabhai and Shri Gopilalaji, to name a few. In Nathdvara, Rajasthan, where the amazing form of *Shri Nathji*, the Krishna manifestation beloved to the Ashta Chaap now resides, I often listen to Narendraji and Vrajlata Ben recite the stories of the Ashta Chaap in the original *Vrajbhasha* language. I thank them for their recitations, which have always been a source of inspiration for me.

My continual thanks to Vallabhdasji, who spent countless hours with this text, editing and making new suggestions on the translations. His selfless efforts have allowed this publication to arise.

"Jai Shree Krishna" to all from our generous sponsors, Jayesh Vijay Dhutia and family of Mombasa, Kenya (info@vijayoptica.com), and Vinita Shyam Gajria of Dubai, UAE. My deep gratitude to these Vaishnavas for their interest in and dedication to Pratham Peeth Publications. Any mistakes in this book are my own. May these accounts of the Ashta Chaap poets' lives inspire us to always live in the mood of devotion and praise.



Introduction

Ashta Chaap means "Eight Seals." In the past, when a king promulgated an order, he stamped the document with his royal seal to make it official. Likewise, when the Lord wants to make an official statement about Himself, He puts His seal upon the one who will declare it. This is the sense of the word *Chhap* in the title conferred upon these eight great 17th century poets. *Chhap* also refers to the stamp of the poet's name, which is included in the last line of each of their compositions.

The Ashta Chaap poets lived in a divine locale at a remarkable time. A bhakti renaissance took place in North India during the late 16th century, creating a resurgence of *Vaishnava* devotion in the sacred region of Vraj, where Shri Krishna Himself had appeared 5000 years previously to delight in sporting plays with the cowlads and dairymaids of Vrindavan. One of the outstanding exponents of Krishna worship at that time was Shri Vallabhacharya (1479-1531 CE), whose teachings swept through central and western India (Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Gujarat). Shri Vallabh appeared for the sole purpose of uplifting divine souls such as the Ashta Chaap.

While Vallabhacharya was on a walking pilgrimage in South India, Shri Krishna appeared before him. The Lord told him that He had manifested as Shri Nathji on top of the Govardhan Hill in Vraj and gave him the divine command to proceed there and begin His worship. Vallabhacharya left immediately for Vraj, where he met Shri Nathji (Shri Krishna's divine form as the Mountain



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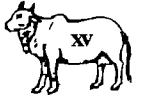
Holder), established His worship, and accepted many of the local people as disciples. Shri Nathji commanded Shri Vallabhacharya, "Make My worship famous."

Shri Vallabhacharya established a mode of divine worship in which Shri Nathji was adorned and offered food and songs daily. Surdas was the first appointed temple singer. He was followed by Paramananda Das, Kumbhandas and Krishnadas. Shri Nathji's worship continued for many years before being greatly expanded and embellished by Vallabhacharya's son, Shri Vitthalnathji (Gusainji). Four of Shri Gusainji's disciples, Nandadas, Chita Swami, Govindadas, and Chaturbhujadas joined Shri Nathji's divine singing group, increasing the ranks to a perfect eight. These eight poets became known as the Ashta Chaap.

Shri Nathji's divine worship, or *seva*, is divided into eight different periods of the day. He is first awakened and offered breakfast, then adorned, worshipped as a cowlad, and offered lunch in the forest. Later He is awakened from an afternoon nap, offered fruits in the forest, returns home with His cows at dusk, and then engages in evening lilas with the dairymaid Gopis. The poetry of the Ashta Chaap follows this divine sequence of a day in the life of Shri Krishna. They reveal Shri Nathji's plays with His family and friends as well as His loving plays with the Gopis.

The *seva* of Shri Nathji supports infinite varieties of devotion. Can the Supreme Being wake up, get dressed and herd cows? Why not? If the Blessed One can bring forth light and fill the oceans with water, why can't He have a little fun, too? According to tradition, Shri Krishna and His divine consort, Shri Swaminiji once felt the separation from the divine souls who had scattered throughout the world. The divine Couple then manifested Themselves together in the form Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya. On the same

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day that Shri Vallabhacharya was born in Champaranya, Shri Nathji's face appeared from within the Govardhan Hill.

Vallabhacharya's divinity was recognized everywhere he went, including on three circumambulations of the Indian subcontinent. The philosophy Vallabhacharya established is so astounding that even accomplished scholars of Vedic philosophy are forced to double-take when they examine the teachings of his Path of Grace. In the Pushti Path, nectar-filled Krishna falls under the sway of His *bhaktas* (devotees). Attainment of Krishna is never dependent upon any means. Resorting to means for attainment is actually an obstacle on this path. Even knowledge of the Lord's greatness can obstruct the path of love. Shri Vallabhacharya awakened the hearts of the Ashta Chaap poets and countless others. Meanwhile, the blessed Lord as Shri Nathji began to appear throughout India to those with initiation and blessed by Shri Vallabhacharya.

In the midst of this bhakti revival, the Ashta Chaap poets created a unique volume of devotional expression, flowing from their personal experience with Shri Krishna. Their main vehicle for attainment was *bhava*. Bhava, the divine mood, can only arise when Krishna is realized. Bhava is bliss – nectar. Bhava is unlimited and arises according to the relationship between the blessed Lord and the blessed soul. Bhava, regardless of circumstance, is always perfect; it is the condition of precise devotional view. The state of liberation, without bhava, could not have inspired a single poem of the Ashta Chaap. So the poets have said, "O friend, worship with bhava the Lord of bhava."

The poems composed by the Ashta Chaap are sung in various ragas, or melodies, varying according to the season, time of day, and festive calendar. This style of praise offered to Shri Krishna which depicts His Lila plays is called



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Lila Kirtan. These songs are still among the main vehicles of worship in the tradition of bhakti and can be heard in nearly any temple devoted to Krishna and every performance of classical Indian music and dance. The Ashta Chaap also composed poems of supplication which reveal the greatness of the blessed Lord, the guru, and fellow practitioners.

Raga is one of the main aspects of the worship offered to Krishna in the Path of Grace. Raga may be interpreted as "love" or as "music." Poems were traditionally sung when recited, and the great mystic poets of those times were often great musicians. The poetry composed by the Ashta Chaap is meant to be sung with musical accompaniment. Its essence is rhythmic invocation, and its real meaning is best expressed when performed as part of devotional service.

Poets of the past were not only musicians, but also seers. Seeing essence makes one a *seer*, an enlightened being. Seeing only the mundane world causes one to eternally return to that world – the only one known to the unenlightened.

In the ancient times of Indian civilization, when the wisdom compilations known as the *Vedas* (literally, "knowledge") were conceived, wisdom was received aurally. The seers, prophets and poets heard the verses, which were later compiled into the wisdom texts considered to be revelations. The most ancient repository of wisdom, the Rg Veda, became song in the Sama Veda. The verses which had been revealed and sung were conscious of their own wisdom. Yet, they were unaware of the supreme divine Essence and confused by the seeming contradiction between the formless Supreme and the Supreme with form. They prayed that their confusion be resolved. Shri Krishna, pleased with their sincere request, granted them the sight



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of His divine realm, Vrindavan. Enraptured by the vision, they requested to be a part of that Lila play. The blessed Lord agreed that when He appeared as Krishna, they would appear as the dairymaid Gopis of Vrindavan. Then, they too would be able to enjoy the bliss which they had praised for eons without actually experiencing. Those lines of sacred scripture took birth as cowherd women in Vraj when Krishna, the Supreme Being, took a human form.

These Ashta Chaap poets' *vartas*, or devotional biographies, recount the lives of Krishna's poet playmates. The *vartas* and poems are written in *Vrajbhasha*, or 'medieval Hindi.' It is the indigenous language of Vraj and the mother tongue of Shri Krishna. In fact, the poems of the Ashta Chaap are written in a *samadhi* language – arising from perfect absorption in the divine. To grasp their essence, one must be susceptible to *Lila* – the lovely forms and movements of Shri Krishna. To mistake Shri Krishna's lilas for something mundane or born of imagination prevents both the comprehension of the poems and the experience of bhava. The Krishna who played with and inspired the Ashta Chaap, although pure Brahman, allowed them to experience His transcendental realm within this world. Yet, He is by no means worldly or mundane. Rather than wait for his beloved souls to rise to the lofty heights of some unattainable divine realm, Shri Krishna brought His perfect reality directly to them.

Through the grace of a teacher, a dream, contact with other practitioners, or simply when higher intuitions rise into the realm of experience, those who are divinely inquisitive somehow manage to make contact with the dharma wheel. As I discovered when I first came to Vraj – Lord Krishna's playground in the heart of India – the best way to become familiar with deep spiritual reality is not through study, but through the lives of the bhaktas. It is



ideal to have their physical association, but when that is not possible, contemplating their lives and poems is also effective. The nectar contained in their tales keeps the devotional heart animated and inspired.

The fruit of the bhakta's senses is to see Shri Krishna, to touch Him, to sing to Him, to be His friend and lover. Shri Nathji brought Surdas water when he was thirsty, threw pebbles at Govindadas, stole dairy products with Chaturbhujadas, and invited Kumbhandas to a cooking contest. Through these and other lilas, the poets' worldly existence became thoroughly divine. Their love for Krishna was not conditioned by fear, nor did their devotion depend upon knowing Krishna's greatness. There were no philosophical problems for them concerning the nature of the Supreme reality, for it was directly experienced. There was no dualism, monism, nor anything besides Krishna. All philosophical contradictions were resolved in Krishna's form, the manifested abode of sweetness. Everything was purely Krishna. Shri Krishna alone can contain the endless contradictions of the world yet remain perfect. Taking refuge in that birthless One, the poets became liberated into eternal bondage to Him.

Three levels of expression must be considered in order to grasp the beauty of this body of literature. Worldly poets create from the power of *kalpana*, or imagination. It arises purely from the speculative mind. A poet may write that Krishna is beautiful as a billion love gods, but without beholding that staggering beauty, its description remains in the realm of imagination. As such, words are not born of experience, they can neither taste nor bestow nectar. Imagination of Krishna Lila creates misrepresentation.

Other inspired ones are on the path towards bhava but have not quite risen to the level of pure realization. They draw from devotional sentiments revealed either in the scriptures or in the lives, writings and teachings of



realized individuals. They can feel those realizations but have not yet fully actualized them. The source of their inspiration is in fact Krishna, the bhava-Being, and they are able to emulate the realization of Him. They can recognize bhava and correctly emulate it. According to Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya, this practice of emulation, called *bhavana*, is the definitive way to attain bhava.

From the position of bhavana, the heart may sense Krishna's unsurpassed beauty, although the vision has yet to appear before one's eyes. In that case, humility and wisdom can compensate for the distance, and the power of grace will eventually remove it altogether. The practice and attainment are never different. Nectar, although partially concealed, can gradually be experienced. It occurs when the heart is fired like a clay pot in the kiln of devotion.

Full comprehension and experience of the divine arise when one arrives at the delicious condition of *bhava*. In that realized state, Shri Krishna's beauty and all beauty connected to Him is directly experienced. Any resulting creative expression can convey the mood and inspire others. For one who has bhava, creation becomes replete with bhava. The Ashta Chaap poets reside within the realm of bhava and are filled with its realization. This qualified them to sing their poems before Shri Nathji, who is the ultimate bhava connoisseur. Their poems and lives are testimonies to what they experienced in the pure bhava realm.

The Ashta Chaap did not go home and ruminate over which poems to sing the next day in the temple. When they came before Shri Nathji, He was alive to them. The bliss element dormant within us all was fully awakened and became real for them. Consciousness and bliss prevailed. For these poets, Shri Nathji was not an image or statue, but more alive than anything else in their world. In that constantly awakened state, they were able to enter



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the lilas of Krishna as Shri Nathji. As poets, it was only natural for them to sing about what they saw and felt.

Poems created from bhava are like mantras. They contain the essence of scripture and when sung in a pure mood, can evoke the bhava from which they were conceived. To this day, Ashta Chaap poems are recited by inspired souls, and they are able to penetrate the depths of their meaning. They can witness what these poets experienced hundreds of years ago. Krishna Lila is not only a historical phenomena which occurred with the appearance of Shri Krishna 5000 years ago or 500 years ago during the time of Shri Vallabhacharya, but rather, a timeless reality that can always be experienced.

Once, when the Ashta Chaap poet Govinda Swami stopped singing in the middle of his song before Shri Nathji, his guru, Shri Vitthalnathji, questioned, "Why did you stop singing?"

Govinda Swami replied, "Krishna just dashed away, and my heart and mind went with Him. I just sang, 'He stealthily sneaks up behind the Gopis, smears their cheeks, and dashes away.' He dashed away, and now that is all I can think about. Since He ran away, how can there be any more play?" Govinda Swami could not imagine this lila; it had to be experienced, with bhava.

Bhava can be felt with eyes open or closed, for the movement of the blessed Lord cannot be limited to a particular sphere. Sometimes, the Ashta Chaap were inspired from lilas they experienced within their hearts. At other times, the form of Krishna manifested directly before them, due to the intensity of their love. Whether inner or outer, their poems are mantras which, when sung with pure mood, can evoke the seed of devotion and yield the divine fruit. For the exceptional, bhava-inspired soul, Krishna Lila can be experienced anytime and anywhere.



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For the rest of us along the way, the bhava of accomplished bhaktas like the Ashta Chaap should be emulated.

For Krishna's bhaktas, the Shrimad Bhagavatam is the ripened fruit of all scriptural knowledge. It provides not only an encyclopedia of spiritual wisdom, but also a record of the lilas of Shri Krishna. If the Shrimad Bhagavatam is the fruit, the songs of the Ashta Chaap are the juice! My guru, His Holiness Goswami Shri Prathameshji told me that the best spiritual practice is to sing the Ashta Chaap poems. As I am doing so, I have gradually come to understand some of his words and teachings.

It was not through any austerities or technical meditations that these eight poets attained Lila awareness; Shri Krishna Himself wanted them to see and then bestowed upon them an uncommon gift. The grace-filled Lord has been known to occasionally forsake His unattainable status and enter into relationship with individuals, in such a way that they can recognize and interact with Him. The gap between the transcendental and the individual soul is filled with mutual appreciation.

The Ashta Chaap poets did not realize the Lord residing only within their hearts; they experienced Him outwardly as well, with all of their senses. Krishna pervaded the world they lived in. They found Him romping through every courtyard, corner, lane, village, and forest in the land of Vraj.

This experience of observing the blessed Lord everywhere, the state of total love, is called *sarvatmabhava*. It exceeds transcendentalism, which rejects all material existence in hopes of attaining something higher. The Lila view holds that there is nothing wrong with the world. Lila involvement is the birthright of the bhakta. Delusion and confusion are simply a result of miscognition. All the fluctuations encountered in life are seen as a lila in which



Shri Krishna is the star of every play. There, even separation provides an experience of total joy.

Whereas Shri Shankaracharya and other absolutists sought to obliterate their personal identity, the supposed cause of suffering, the Ashta Chaap poets offered their individual identities into the fire of devotion. Each poet wrote with individual expression, drawing creative inspiration from every place and situation. The simplest acts of daily living, along with the range of emotional states – from love, desire, to jealousy, all appear in their poetry. Nothing caused suffering, because everything was directed towards the supremely blissful Shri Krishna.

While great Yogis practicing abstract meditation never catch a glimpse of Shri Krishna, He dances before the Gopis for a glass of buttermilk. While the Vedas are unable to grasp the Lord and proclaim that He is "Not that, not that," Mother Yashoda binds Shri Krishna with a rope. While hermits grow thin from their austerities, Shri Krishna enjoys lunch with His friends by the cool banks of the Yamuna River. While the greatest of intellectuals try to confine Him within the narrow limits of their mind, the sweet note of Shri Krishna's flute steals the minds of the Gopis, causing them to forget everything except their beloved Lord. While the renunciate shuns the world and seeks solitude, the Lord's bhakta offers it all to Him and then lives happily within it.

The Ashta Chaap poets display a rare combination of artistic perfection, renunciation, and passionate devotion. Their lives and songs enhance even Shri Krishna's flavor. For hundreds of years, their songs have been sung, their life accounts told and retold in the homes of devotional practitioners all over India. How this nectar is dispersed was forecasted by the Ashta Chaap poet, Paramananda Das:



*Upon seeing Shri Radha's full moon face,
an ocean of bliss swells in Krishna's body
and overflows into Vraj and Vrindavan.
Here, it is stopped by the Yamuna River,
and there, by the Gopis.*

*A little of the remaining nectar is spread
throughout the three worlds,
but it never touches practitioners
on the paths of action and knowledge.
It remains within the hearts of those
who savor the highest mood.*

*They slowly take it all in,
through the power of their intelligence.
Krishna makes such lilas every moment
for the sake of His bhaktas.
By the grace of Nanda's Son,
a bit of this nectar flow can be seen
in those who have contact with Supreme Bliss.*

Shri Krishna loves to steal butter, soft like our most tender emotions. He is the divine Thief who may return at any moment, even now in the twenty-first century, and sweeten our lives with His love-provoking antics. It is the sincere hope of the author that the Ashta Chaap poets' inspirations will seep into these pages and creep into the hearts of the readers.

Sept 24 2008
Janmastami

SHYAMDAS



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Editor's Notes on the Translation and Text

This text presents original English translations of stories taken from *Do Sau Bhavan Vaishnava ki Varta* and *Chaurasi Vaishnava ki Varta** – the accounts of Shri Gusainji's 252 and Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya's 84 Vaishnavas. These two Vrajbhasha works are attributed to Shri Gokulnathji. The main text by Shri Gokulnathji is interspersed with commentary called *Bhavprakash* – literally, 'bhava illumination' – composed by Shri Harirayaji, another great Acharya and author of the Vallabhacharya lineage. We have distinguished the Bhavprakash commentary with italic font. Other single words appearing in italics are referenced in the glossary at the end of the book. In the original text, the individual anecdotes within each poet's life account are only numbered. We have created simple descriptive titles for these as well, so that they can be easily referenced.

We have striven to make the text comprehensible to every reader by translating Sanskrit and Vrajbhasha terminology where possible and using the original terms where no adequate English translation exists. There are many terms highly contextual to the poets' Pushti Marg devotional lineage, as well as concepts or activities which do not exist in English (*bhava*, *darshan*, *arati*, *lila*, *seva*, etc.).

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The meaning of some terms is known only to learned experts of Vraj with knowledge of the old literary language of their culture. Shyamdas lives in Vraj most of the year and takes that opportunity to draw from the local wisdom of his teachers and associates there.

The Vrajbhasha of these stories is an indigenous village language, and accordingly, much of the prose is simple and repetitive. Our main embellishments consist of adding variety to basic repetition found in the original text. For example, nearly all quotations in the original are preceded either by "said" or "asked." To bring out the emotions of the speaker and meaning of their words, we have translated those words variously as 'inquired, submitted, prayed, explained, exclaimed, rebuked, retorted,' etc., after carefully considering of the mood of the speaker. Similarly, the original text uses only a few adjectives like *good*, *beautiful*, and *angry* repeatedly. As modern readers are accustomed to more variety, we have used an assortment of translations for these words, depending on the context.

The poems and the commentary section of the text include a fair amount of Sanskrit, as well as highly Sanskritized Vrajbhasha, often with reference to the great literature of India: the Shrimad Bhagavatam, Bhagavat Gita, Brahmasutras, and the Vedas. The poetry in particular is intelligible only with intuition and deep familiarity with the moods of Krishna worship. Our translations are possible only due to Shyamdas' longtime study of this tradition, its languages and texts.

Readers of previous volumes have cited as their favorite line of these stories the last line of every bhakta's account: '*tate inke varta kaha tai kahiye?* – Therefore, to what extent can her story be told?' We have translated this line with a few variations. We hope you enjoy every line of this text as much as we have while translating it for you.



Cast of Characters:

Shri Nathji

(*Shri Krishna = Shri Govardhan Nathji = Devadaman =
Shri Thakurji = "Maharaj"*)

The divine form of Shri Krishna who appeared and played with the Ashta Chaap poets and resided in a temple on top of the Govardhan Hill.

Shri Swaminiji

(*Shri Radha*)

The most intimate and favored divine consort of Shri Krishna

Shri Vallabhacharya

(*Shri Mahaprabhuji = Shri Acharyaji = "Maharaj"*)

Philosopher and founder of the Pushti Marg, the Path of Grace. Guru to four of the Ashta Chaap and to all other followers of the Path of Grace. Considered to be the form of Shri Swaminiji

Shri Gusainji

(*Shri Vitthalnathji = "Maharaj"*)

Son of Shri Vallabhacharya, guru to four of the Ashta Chaap, a master of bhakti and uplifter of countless divine souls. Considered to be the incarnation of Shri Krishna Himself.

Shri Gusainji's seven sons:

Shri Girdharji

Shri Govindaji

Shri Balkrishnaji

Shri Gokulnathji

Shri Raghunathji

Shri Yadunathji

Shri Ghanashyamji



Ramdas Chohan ('Ramdas Bhitiriya')

Shri Nathji's head temple priest

Emperor Akbar

The Mughal ruler of India

Raja Mansingh, Raja Todarmal and Raja Birbal

Associates and ministers of the Emperor



Surdas

Introduction

Of the eight poets whose stories will be told in this book, Surdas is surely the best known. The five-hundredth anniversary of Surdas' birth was celebrated on May 12, 1978. His collected works are known as Sur's Ocean (*Sur Sagar*), and he is credited with more poems than any of the other Ashta Chaap. The story of Surdas, along with those of Paramananda Das, Kumbhandas, and Krishnadas, has been taken from the *Eighty-four Vaishnavas*, a work containing the stories of the disciples of Shri Vallabhacharya.

Surdas' best poetry is the devotional expression of his personal experience with Shri Krishna. His story reveals that he was on the spiritual path from childhood and describes how he attained the vision of Krishna's Lila when he met Shri Vallabhacharya. Through that contact, he attained intimate acquaintance with Krishna. The mood of that realization reverberates throughout his poetry.

In his ocean, Surdas has sung about every aspect of the lilas of Radha and Krishna. Even from the few poems found in his story, it is clear that Surdas has covered a wide spectrum of devotional attitudes, disproving the commonly-held belief that he sang only about Child Krishna. While the poems of Kumbhandas and Chaturbhujadas reveal focus centered upon the amorous aspect of Shri Krishna, Surdas and Paramananda Das praised so many different



aspects of the Divine that it is impossible to confine them to a single attitude. Intimate love flourishes throughout their works. Even in poems praising infant Krishna, for example, He enchants the hearts of young women. Shri Krishna alone can maintain all such contradictions.

To partake of Surdas' enlightenment, one must be sensitive to Krishna's Lila. To mistake his descriptions for something born of imagination is to miss the essence of what Surdas was singing about. His poems are description of the enlightened heart, not the imaginative mind. His story demonstrates the crucial difference between imagination and *bhava*. Imagination is devoid of divine foundation, and its effects remain trivial; *bhava* holds the power of direct revelation of the blessed Lord.

Surdas and his story are so well known in India that his name has become synonymous with blindness. The question is not whether he was blind from birth, as the story makes clear, but how he was able to see Krishna. In the anecdotes of Surdas' meeting with Emperor Akbar and the test instigated for him by Shri Gusainji's sons, the answer given is that Surdas saw with spiritual insight. His blindness was only to the mundane world.¹

Surdas' story is that of an ideal devotee, pure from birth. He overcame the obstacles of "name and fame" to delve deeply into spiritual essence. His devotion to Shri Krishna is impeccable, and his story provides continual insight into the life of an enlightened soul.



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Surdas was born a Sarasvat Brahmin and lived near Delhi, in a town called Sinhim. In Shri Krishna's Lila, Surdas is one of the blessed Lord's eight close friends and is named Krishnasakha. The doubt could arise here that in the Lila, the Gopis – and not Shri Krishna's sakha cowherd friends – experience the Nikunja bower lilas with Shri Krishna; how then could Surdas sing of those secret lilas without having experienced them? As revealed in the Shrimad Bhagavatam, when Shri Krishna goes to the forest with His friends to herd His cows, the Gopis remain at home. From their homes, they still are able to praise and even experience all of Shri Krishna's forest lilas with His cowlad friends. In the late afternoon Shri Krishna returns home from the forest, and later in the evening He makes lilas with the Gopis in the Nikunja bowers of Vrindavan. Shri Krishna's most intimate cowlad friends then feel divine separation from Him, and by praising His intimate nighttime plays with the Gopis, they can actually experience them.

The Gopis who play with Krishna in the intimate glades of Vrindavan actually have two forms. During the day, they sport with Krishna as His male cowlad friends, and at night, they make lila with Shri Krishna as female Gopis. The Vedic hymns have incarnated in Vrindavan as the Gopis, while the Vedic mantras are the Gopas – His cowlad friends.

Although the Gopis appear as women, and some even had worldly husbands, they are not worldly women and had no worldly activities to fulfill. They are like the parched seed, which will not grow even if planted in the dirt.



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In these nectar-formed lilas, there is always a singular nectar. Shri Krishna's closest cowlad friends are part of His very form. So both His female and male companions remain engaged in the nectarous lilas, day and night. Surdas appears as 'Krishnasakha' during the day, while at night, in the kunja bower Lila, he is a sakhi named 'Champaka Lata.' With the grace of his guru, Shri Vallabhacharya, Surdas experienced all of Shri Krishna's lilas.

Here one could question that if Surdas is truly connected to the all blissful Lila, then why didn't he experience Krishna's Lila before meeting Shri Vallabhacharya? Why was he made unaware? For the purpose of manifesting His own glory, Shri Krishna appears on this earth and enacts lilas which appear like the ways of the world. When worldly people sing of His lilas here on earth, they become spiritually accomplished. In that same way, the worldly lilas which Shri Krishna's bhaktas perform here on earth actually reveal His divine reality.

Consider Rukminiji. She is actually the very form of Shri Lakshmi, yet, after being born in this world, she prayed to a goddess in order to secure Shri Krishna as her Husband! She then sent a Brahmin to Shri Krishna to arrange for their marriage. This all occurred for the purpose of manifesting the divine Lila here on earth. Similarly, the goddess Kalindiji appeared from the sun and then made a temple by Shri Yamunaji, where she did austerities and later told Arjuna, "I want to marry Shri Krishna." Only then did Shri Krishna marry her. These are simply the plays of the Lord, for both Rukminiji and Shri Kalindiji are actually Shri Krishna's eternal lovers.

In Vraj, Shri Swaminiji and Shri Krishna are a single form, but in order to initiate the Vraj lila, Shri Krishna manifested in the home of Nanda Baba, and Shri Swaminiji appeared in the home of Brishabhana. Day and night, they sought ways of meeting each other. This lila only arose here on earth, for otherwise, They remain together as one, constantly absorbed in Their own nectar Lila.

Surdas



In the same way, only after becoming Shri Vallabhacharya's disciple could Surdas sing of Shri Krishna lilas, and thereby the glories of the Master Shri Vallabhacharya increased. Surdas was such an accomplished being. After taking the shelter of Shri Vallabhacharya's lotus feet, he manifested within this world the divine praises of Lord Krishna's Lila, so that later, others could sing his songs and attain the Lord.

When Surdas was born in Sinhim in the year 1479, twelve kilometers from Delhi, he had no knowledge of Shri Krishna's lilas. Sinhim is the town where Janmejaya performed a snake sacrifice after his father, King Parikshit was killed by a snake.* Surdas was born of Sarasvata Brahmin parents. He was born without eyes or even eye sockets – only an eyebrow. His parents already had three sons and lived in severe poverty. His father was disturbed to see this child with no eyes and thought to himself, "First the Creator made me poor, and now He has given me a blind child! Who will look after him? Who will lead him around with his stick?" Surdas' father was greatly pained over the situation. He said, "A person born with no eyes is called blind, not 'Sura – the sun!'" No one in Surdas' home loved him – not his mother, father, nor his siblings. They thought, 'What kind of a son has no eyes?' and so they didn't even talk to him.

Life continued thus for Surdas until one day, when he was six, a wealthy Kshatriya from the village gave Surdas' father a gift of two gold coins. Taking the bounty home, he joyfully exclaimed to his wife and children, "The Lord has blessed me with two golden coins. Tomorrow I will use them to buy enough food supplies for the next two to four months!"

After showing the coins to everyone, he wrapped them in a cloth, put them inside a closet, and went to sleep. That

* The sacred Shrimad Bhagavatam text is recorded in the form of a dialogue between the sage Shukadev and King Parikshit, who was desperate to attain enlightenment after being cursed to die in seven days from a snake bite.



night, a mouse took the golden coins and put them in a hole in another corner of the house. The following morning, when Surdas' father could not find the coins, he and his wife beat their chests and wailed piteously, feeling tremendously afflicted. They passed the whole day full of anxiety, without even eating or drinking. Their young son Surdas, seeing the futility of their grief, told them, "Why are you agonizing and suffering over this worldly problem? You should serve and remember the Lord – then everything will be just fine."

Hearing this unwelcome advice, his parents reacted sharply, "Since the very moment you were born, Sur, we have spent our lives in suffering. We have not known a single happy moment since then. We have not even had enough food to eat. Yesterday, the Lord gave us two gold coins, and now they too have disappeared!"

Surdas replied, "If you promise not to keep me here, I will tell you where your coins are. But do not follow me after I leave, and don't ever ask me to live in your house again."

His parents replied, "What else could we want? If you tell us where the coins are and we find them, you can go wherever you like. We will not try to stop you."

Surdas then explained, "A mouse has taken your coins and put them in a hole in the corner of the house."

Surdas' father then searched where Surdas had indicated and found the coins. Then, as Surdas began to leave, his parents felt a surge of attachment towards him. They said to themselves, 'Look, Surdas has developed great powers. We found the coins exactly where he said they would be!' With that in mind, they tried to reason with him, "Why are you leaving home? Stay and eat the food which we will buy with the gold coins. Afterwards, you can go wherever it is you are going."

Surdas replied, "If you detain me here, your coins will be lost again, and you will be distressed."



Leaving his parents speechless, Surdas took a stick in hand and left home. After walking twelve kilometers, he came upon a lake at the outskirts of a town. He sat down in the shade of a holy fig tree and quenched his thirst with water from the lake. Late that afternoon, a Brahmin landowner from the town passed by the lake and mentioned to Surdas, "Ten of my cows have been missing for three days. I will reward whoever finds them by letting him keep two of those cows."

Surdas replied, "What use would I have for two cows? But, since you asked, I will tell you where your cows are. There is a town just a few kilometers from here. A landowner from that town sent his men during the night to steal your ten cows, and he has tied up your cows next to his horse stable."

The Brahmin immediately gathered ten men and proceeded to that landowner's home, where he found his cows exactly where Surdas had described. The Brahmin returned to the blind boy and told him, "I found my cows exactly where you told me, so these two cows are for you to keep."

Surdas explained, "I have left my home and sit here taking the sole refuge of the blessed Lord. Why would I take your two cows?"

The Brahmin landowner, considering that Surdas was a mere child, began to advise him, "My boy! You are the son of some Brahmin. You have no eyes, nor is there anyone to take care of you here. Why have you left your home in such a state of displeasure? How will you make it through the day with no eyes?"

Surdas replied, "I have not left my home to depend upon you. I have left my home in search of Lord Narayana. He sustains the universe and can certainly take care of me. Whatever my destiny is, so be it."

The man suggested to Surdas, "I am a Brahmin, and my wife has made roti breads at home. If you simply say the word, I will bring them here for you."



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Surdas replied, "I don't eat stale breads."

The Brahmin went home and had some fresh puris (fried breads) made and brought them to Surdas with some milk. After filling Surdas' water, he said, "Surdas, now don't worry about anything. So long as the Lord gives me something to eat, I will supply you. I will bring you food in the morning, either by this lake or in town, wherever you say."

The following morning, the Brahmin came and asked Surdas, "So, where do you want to reside?"

Surdas told him, "I wish to reside for some days by this lake, right here under this fig tree."

The Brahmin built a hut for Surdas to live in and appointed one of his own servants to wait upon him. Later, the Brahmin told some other people, "There is a young boy here, Surdas, who is a very wise being. He told me where my ten missing cows were, and he can predict the future! I have made a hut for him under a fig tree by the edge of the lake. I daily send him fresh fried breads, curd and milk, and I have given him a servant. If you want to know anything about the future, or anything else, just go and ask him."

After hearing his words, the people of the town began to visit Surdas. He answered whatever questions they asked, and events unfolded exactly as he predicted. Soon they began to worship him, and the crowds grew. People brought him delicious food and fine clothes, and Surdas' wealth and glory increased. Surdas began to be called 'Sur Swami - Master of the Sun,' and many people became his followers. They built him a large house by the lake and removed his small hut. Sur Swami started accepting disciples and initiating them by giving them a tulsi necklace.

Surdas sang poems for his disciples expressing his pangs of separation from the Lord. Due to his proficiency in composing poetry and singing, and his extraordinary powers, Surdas' fame and wealth continued to increase. He lived by the edge of that

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lake until he was eighteen years old. One night, as he was going to sleep, a sense of true renunciation arose within Surdas, and he pondered, "In order to meet the Lord, I renounced my home. Yet here I have been caught in the spell of maya. Just look! Why have I been enhancing my own greatness? It would have been better to spread the greatness of Hari. I have ruined myself here. I shall leave this place in the morning."

The following morning, he sent one of his disciples to call on his parents. Surdas entrusted his house and everything else to them. Wearing a single cloth and carrying a stick in hand, Surdas left that place. Those disciples who were caught in the webs of illusion and stuck in the mundane world remained behind, whereas those freed from the mundane accompanied Surdas.

As they were leaving, Surdas thought, "Vraj is the land of Shri Krishna; we should proceed there." When they reached Vishranti Ghat at Mathura, however, Surdas realized, "If I remain here, my fame will spread once again. This is Lord Krishna's city, and so it is not proper to gather fame here. In samsara, the world of mundane suffering, so many people find pleasure and pain, and such worldly people will come to me to ask about everything. Also, if my celebrity increases here, the religious Brahmin guides of the area, the Mathura Chaubes, will suffer. It is not proper to reside here."

Surdas continued downstream from Mathura and made a place for himself at Go Ghat, on the holy banks of the Yamuna River. Because he had a melodious voice, was an accomplished musician, and could also tell the future correctly, again many people congregated around him. Many more became his disciples, and Surdas became famous throughout the land.



1.

Surdas meets Shri Mahaprabhuji

Surdas was residing at Go Ghat when Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya arrived there on his pilgrimage from Adel to Vraj [in the year 1511 CE]. Shri Mahaprabhuji, accompanied by many disciples, proceeded to the Yamuna River and bathed, completed his sandhya prayers, and then began the food preparations. His disciples began to cook as well, each according to his or her daily seva practice.

One of Surdas' disciples reported to him, "Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya has arrived here today! He is the one who established the path of devotion and crushed *Mayavada* philosophy by defeating the heads of Shri Shankaracharya's lineage and other religious sects in debates at Benares and Vijayanagar."²

Surdas requested of his disciple, "Inform me once Shri Mahaprabhuji has finished taking his meals and is sitting comfortably on his seat, ready to receive people. I will go and have his darshan; I want to meet the master."

That disciple returned to Shri Mahaprabhuji and sat nearby. After Shri Mahaprabhuji had taken his meals and was sitting outside, surrounded by his disciples, Surdas' follower reported to the blind bard that the guru was now receiving people.

Surdas, accompanied by all of his own disciples, came before Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya and prostrated fully before him. Shri Vallabhacharya immediately spoke, "Sur! Praise the blessed Lord's glory in song!"

Surdas bowed before the master, saying, "Maharaj! As you wish," and sang the following poem:



O Hari!

*I am foremost among all sinners.
Anyone as wicked as I am
deserves disrespect.*

*That which you have done for Ajamila,³
I found written on paper.*

*My heart will only have real faith
when you call other sinners close to You.*

*I have attracted followers from here and there
and gathered them together in one place.*

Many have joined, and now, so many more.

*My mind rejoices and celebrates,
while I act just to fill my stomach.*

To be trampled by all is the fate I'll meet.

*Oh, Lord of life! In fabricating all of this,
I have ceased to remember You.*

*Now, it is your turn to liberate me,
sings Sur, the greatest of the sinners.⁴*

Then Surdas sang another poem:

Lord, I am the crown of the sinners.

*Others have sinned for a few days,
while I've been a sinner from birth.*

*You've delivered Ajamila, murderers,
prostitutes and the demoness Putana.⁵*

Deserting me, you have liberated others.

*Now, why won't you remove my suffering?
I maintain that no one has the power to catch and
purify the way you can.*

*Sings Sur, "I am the Sun of sinners,⁶
yet everyone says I am really pure."*



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Hearing Surdas' poem, Shri Mahaprabhuji remarked, "How is it that Sur, whose name means, 'Warrior,' whimpers thus? Praise the Lord's lilas in song!"

[Shri Harirayaji's 'bhavprakash' commentary]: What the bhakti master meant is that when the soul is separated from the Lord, she becomes fallen, but what is the point of talking a lot about that? It is better to sing about the Lord's glory, which purifies the heart.

Surdas then humbly admitted, "I know nothing of Hari's lilas."

Shri Mahaprabhuji turned to him and said, "Go now and bathe in the Yamuna River. When you return, I will explain them to you."

After Surdas had bathed and returned cleansed to the bhakti master, Shri Mahaprabhuji graced him with *Ashtakshara mantra*⁷ and then completed Surdas' dedication by initiating him with the *Brahma Sambandha mantra*.⁸ Then Shri Mahaprabhuji explained to him the tenth canto of the *Shrimad Bhagavata*.⁹

Through the *Ashtakshara mantra*, all of Surdas' impurities were removed, and he attained the seven devotional practices: to hear the Lord's praises, to remember Him, to praise Him, to worship His feet, wait upon Him, to offer salutations to Him, and to be a pure follower. The *Brahma Sambandha mantra* conferred upon Surdas the perfection of these seven devotions as well as the last two stages of the ninefold devotional process (*navadha bhakti*): intimate friendship and total soulful surrender to the Lord. The only thing which then remained for Surdas was *Prem Lakshana Bhakti*, the highest devotional love. Therefore Shri Mahaprabhuji explained to him the contents of the tenth canto of the *Shrimad Bhagavata*, by hearing which, all of Shri Krishna's lilas became

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established in Surdas' heart. He then attained the highest state of devotion – pure love.

After Shri Mahaprabhuji gave Surdas total knowledge of the secret devotional teachings found in his *Shri Subodhini* text, the divine lilas arose clearly in Surdas' heart. Shri Mahaprabhuji has written in the 'mangalacharan' introduction to the 10th canto section of *Shri Subodhini*,

"I bow to Shri Krishna, an ocean of divine potency. He resides within the limitless heart, in a milky and nectarine ocean of divine plays, where He is served by thousands of Lakshmis, all engaged in His Lila."

Surdas then sang before the great master the following poem, in accordance with that line:

*Chakai bird!*¹⁰ *Fly now to the reservoir of the Lord's feet, where there is no separation from love – where the oblivion of darkness never prevails.*

It is a sea of joyous union.

*There, Sanaka*¹¹ *resides as a swan, celestial singers are the fish,*

and Krishna's toenails shine as the sun.

*There, blooming lotuses never fear the moon,*¹² *and black bees hum the sweet Vedas.*

In that lake, blessed liberated pearls imbibe the pure waters of glory.

Oh silly bird! Why would you ever leave that lake?

What are you doing here?

In that lake, thousands of Lakshmis are always making splendid lila.



*Sings Surajadas,
 "Now, I have no taste for anything petty.
 My hopes lie in that lake."*

That poem corresponds to the latter half of the verse from Shri Vallabhacharya's mangalacharan: "...where He is served by thousands of Lakshmis, all engaged in His lila." Just as that line describes, so Surdas sang in his poem: "In that lake, thousands of Lakshmis are always making splendid lila."

As is evident from this line, Surdas began to experience all of Shri Krishna's lilas described in Shri Subodhini. Shri Mahaprabhuji was delighted with Surdas and knew that he now understood the nature of Shri Krishna's Lila. He then asked him, "Sing about the festivities of Shri Krishna's appearance day." Surdas then broke into song, describing the great joy surrounding the birth of Shri Krishna:

When the people and singers of Gokul heard that Nanda was the father of a newborn son, Shri Krishna, their joy was boundless. Throughout that blessed town, festive columns were raised. After considering all the astrological factors of Krishna's birth, the position of the stars, the hours and minutes, the Vedas were sung. Upon hearing the news, the women of Vraj adorned themselves in new clothes. They applied collyrium to their eyes and a vermillion dot on their foreheads. They donned exquisite necklaces, tied their bodices, wore golden bangles and carried golden trays filled with auspicious delicacies. They rushed from their homes like a flock of Lalumi birds escaping from their cages. Gathering in groups of five and ten, they sang joyous songs and appeared like golden lotuses which bloom upon seeing the sun.



Those dairymaids wore colorful saris, and they didn't even notice that the shawls covering their breasts had blown open. Red powder highlighted their faces and filled the part in their hair. Their ears were adorned with resplendent earrings. Their hair braids were loosely tied with flower garlands that showered to the ground like rain from a cloud.

Those joyous Gopis were the first to reach the house of Nanda, the abode of their Beloved. Entering the premises, they bowed their heads at everyone's feet. One of the Gopis, whose face was unveiled, saw Shri Krishna and began to praise Him loudly, 'Long live the Son of Yashoda, the one who fulfills all wishes! Blessed is this day, blessed is this night, this hour, this moment! Blessed is the womb of Yashoda, to have given birth to such a Child. The all-blissful flower has blossomed. Yashoda continues her lineage and rids every heart of distress.'

Then the Gopis began to call for the Child to be brought outside. They made gunja bead necklaces, and used powdered natural colors to make decorations in the square. Other Gopis who were on their way to Nanda's house carried large pots of curd and butter on their heads. New cheers erupted from their throats, accompanied by the beating of the dap drum, mridangam, and cymbals. One danced, while another sprinkled yoghurt and turmeric. As they all arrived at Nanda's place, the yoghurt and ghee flowed like a river during the rainy season month of Bhadrapada. Wherever one looked, there was a spectacle.

The cowlads were in bliss beyond description. One of them ran to Nanda and repeatedly fell at his feet. A second laughed to himself while embracing everyone. A third fearlessly pulled at everyone's clothes, while yet another poured curd and milk over everyone's head.

After Nanda bathed and scented his hands, he worshipped his deceased ancestors, casting off the sorrow felt by a family lineage which does not continue. He then sent for



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some fine sandalwood paste, applied tilaks on all the Brahmins' foreheads, gave them clothes, and bowed down at their feet. Then Nanda called for numerous cows capable of yielding plentiful milk and strong calves grazing by the banks of the Yamuna River. He put copper on their hooves, silver on their backs and gold on their horns and gave them to the Brahmins, who were grateful and showered their blessings.

Nanda laughed with his friends and honored them with tilaks made from a mixture of musk, sandalwood balm and camphor. He then placed jeweled necklaces over their heads and gave them fine garments. Peacocks and frogs called out, as if the recently passed rainy season month of Ashaad had suddenly begun anew.

Singers, bards, and storytellers filled the square, calling Nanda's name, 'Don't forget our interests!' Nanda honored them and fulfilled their desires by presenting them generous gifts. Rohini sent for musk and striped, colored saris. She offered them to the Vraj women, who joyfully strode out of Nanda's house, showering blessings as they proceeded to their husbands' homes.

The beating of drums was heard in every house. Streamers, flags, and golden pots were displayed by every home. Since that day, the people of Vraj have not left the wealth of Krishna's joy.¹³

Shri Vallabhacharya listened as Surdas' described the magnificent celebrations of Krishna's birth at father Nanda Baba's house, but when the poet was about to sing of what took place in the Gopis' homes, Mahaprabhuji intervened,

"O, listen Sur! Everyone who worships Lord Krishna's feet will reach that destiny."

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With this final line, Mahaprabhuji silenced Surdas. The bliss of the bhaktas of Vraj is something to be experienced in the hearts of great devotees. Shri Mahaprabhuji stopped Surdas from revealing that intimate love outwardly. Surdas also had considered in his heart, "I have made all these disciples. What will become of them?" Mahaprabhuji answered his doubts by reciting that line, "O, listen Sur! Everyone who worships Lord Krishna's feet will reach that destiny."

Shri Mahaprabhuji commented happily, "Surdas sings as if he is standing just next to Nanda's house, witnessing the Lord's divine Lila." Later, he explained to Surdas *Purushottama Sahasranam* – Shri Krishna's Thousand Names,¹⁴ whereby the lilas depicted in the entire Shrimad Bhagavatam, from the first to the twelfth cantos, became firmly established in his heart. Surdas then began to sing of those and a number of other lilas, such as *maan* and *daan* lilas.¹⁵

Shri Mahaprabhuji stayed at Go Ghat for three days before proceeding to Gokul, the place of Shri Krishna's childhood lilas. Surdas and his former disciples, who had all become Shri Vallabhacharya's followers as well, joined their guru. Upon reaching Gokul, Shri Mahaprabhuji told Surdas, "Now, behold Gokul!"

As Surdas prostrated himself toward the holy village, he experienced Lord Krishna's childhood plays within his heart. He thought, "How will I praise these Gokul lilas?"

Surdas then considered, "Shri Mahaprabhuji's heart is attached to Shri Navanita Priyaji,¹⁶ the child form of Shri Krishna." He therefore decided to praise Krishna's Gokul lilas by singing about Shri Navanita Priyaji. He sang the following poem:



*Krishna holds butter in His lovely hand
and crawls across the sands.
His mouth is smeared with curds.
He has lovely cheeks and anxious eyes.
His brow is anointed with a special blend
of sandalwood paste.
His curly locks appear like lines of
intoxicated black bees drinking honey.
His tiger pendant soothes the Gopis' hearts.¹⁷
Sings Sur, one moment of this bliss is a fortune –
without that joy, to live even for a thousand ages
would be useless!*

Shri Mahaprabhuji was delighted to hear this poem. After Surdas sang some other poems in praise of Child Krishna, the Master reflected, "I have already arranged for Shri Govardhan Nathji's temple and His divine worship (*seva*). Now, I will appoint Surdas there, and he can sing for Shri Nathji according to His daily, seasonal, and festival lilas. In this way, future bhaktas who sing Surdas' poems will become devotionally accomplished."¹⁸

Mahaprabhuji took Surdas to the Govardhan Hill and told him as they entered Shri Nathji's temple, "Now, behold Shri Nathji, and sing *kirtan* – His glories." Surdas first sang a poem of humble salutation before the Lord:

*I've danced enough, Gopal!
I've worn a shirt of lust and fury –
around my neck, a necklace of worldliness!
My anklets, forged of deep infatuation,
resounded with words of blame.
My mind, a pakahavaj drum, filled with doubts
that swayed with the gait of a swan.
My body echoed with the sounds of desire
in so many different rhythms.*



*I wore a sash of illusion.
A tilak of greed adorned my forehead.
My loincloth has been filled with the cunning
of a thousand frauds.
I am unaware of earth, water and time.
Says Surdas, "Krishna, the Child of Nanda
expels all this ignorance."*

After listening to Surdas sing that poem, Shri Mahaprabhuji told him, "There is no more ignorance in your heart; Shri Nathji has removed it all. Now you should continue to sing about the Lord's lilas, with knowledge of His greatness and boundless love."

This much can be said of all intimate devotees of the Lord: they consider themselves lowly; humility is their main virtue. Anyone who calls himself great or celebrates over himself is always turned away from the Lord.

Surdas then sang before Shri Acharyaji and Shri Govardhan Nathji a poem which depicted not only the Lord's greatness, but the nature of love as well:

Brahma, Shiva, and the thousand-headed serpent god Shesa all wonder what meritorious acts the people of Vraj could have performed that for their sake, Lord Krishna appeared amidst them in human form.

The Lord is formed brilliance; the entire creation rests in Him. He is the spiritual master of the world, its father, its Lord. That same Lord, though difficult to realize by Yoga, sacrifice, mantra recitation, austerities, and fasts, dwells in the house of the king of Gokul!

In His belly rest the three worlds as well as all the creatures of land and sea, the five elements and the four



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directions. Yet, that very same Lord is the treasure of mother Yashoda's household and swings in a cradle at home.

Out of His every pore emanate millions of gigantic universes, each with equal amounts of bliss. Yet, mother Yashoda takes that same Krishna in her lap and threatens Him, stick in hand.

His eyes contain the brilliance of a million suns and moons and can dispel the threefold miseries.¹⁹ Still, His mother applies collyrium to His eyes to keep them healthy.

With only three steps, the compassionate Lord measured the entire universe and tricked King Bali, sending him to the nether regions. Yet, that very same Lord is unable to cross the doorstep and has to play within Nanda's house.²⁰

Every day He enjoys the fifth ambrosia²¹ that flows from the celestial cow. Yet, that very same Lord declines that elixir in favor of His own mother's milk! He affords pleasure to His devotees.

The Vedas, Upanishads, Vedanta and the six scriptures are all offered to the Lord, but He does not bother to enjoy them. Krishna prefers to laugh amidst His cowherd friends and eat their leftovers!

He is the Lord of Shri Lakshmi and bestower of the eternal realm of Vaikuntha; all happiness and sorrow rest in His hands. Yet, that same Lord wanders barefoot through the forest with His cows, with a black blanket over His shoulder and wooden walking stick in His hand.

The whole world knows He is the Creator, Destroyer, the Giver, Enjoyer, as well as the Almighty. Yet, when caught stealing butter, He was bound by Nanda's queen, Mother Yashoda.

He gave final liberation to Putana, Bakasura, Sakata, Trinavarta, Aghasura, Dhenuka, Vrshabhasa Kesi, and Kamsa²² and kept them in the abode of His feet.

Surdas



My Krishna is affectionate with His devotees. He uplifts the fallen and is always complete. Surdas, the king of the fallen, was stopped in his tracks while passing by Krishna's door.²³

Shri Mahaprabhuji was very pleased to hear that song.

Shri Acharyaji was pleased because Surdas composed that poem in accordance with the principles of his Path of Grace, in which 'Mahatmya gyaan purvaka drdha sneha' – full knowledge of the Lord's greatness accompanied by firm, divine love, is valued above all else, for it is pleasing to the Lord.

One might ask, 'Why must an individual maintain awareness of the Lord's greatness?' Without knowledge of the Lord's greatness, one would have no fear of indulging in wrong activities. That is why, in the initial stages of devotional life, it is essential to combine one's love for the Lord with awareness of His greatness. The pure love that the people of Vraj experienced is most exalted. In that state, knowledge of His greatness falls away. Lord Krishna falls under His bhaktas' control and chases after them. Until we develop that perfect love, we should never forget His greatness. If we simply claim to have love and, disregarding His greatness, gossip when sitting before Him, turning our backs to Him, we will fall spiritually. By considering His greatness and retaining some fear of improper actions, grace will arise. When pure love for Lord Krishna arises in you, the power of that firm love is so great that your cognition of the Lord's awesome, omnipotent characteristics will naturally fade away.

In the tenth canto of the Shrimad Bhagavatam, Shri Krishna repeatedly demonstrated His greatness to the people of Vrindavan and His mother Yashoda, through lilas in which He destroyed many demons like Putana, Sakata, Trinavarta, Yamala Arjuna, Bakasura, Dhenuka and Kalidama. Yet, because



the pure love those Vraj bhaktas cherished for Shri Krishna was so indescribably and supremely amazing, they never saw Him as all-powerful and majestic.

If the Lord graces someone with the gift of pure love like He gave to Vraj bhaktas, their awe of His greatness will also fall away. However, if we simply discard our awe of the Lord and direct our love in mundane ways towards our spouse, family and wealth, or become engrossed in bodily pleasures, we lose our wisdom and offend the Lord. Therefore, one should make seva mindfully, following the sacred teachings and fearing transgressions. This is the way of Shri Acharyaji Mahaprabhu's Blessed Path: to love the Lord with knowledge of His greatness. That is the meaning of "Mahatmya gyaan purvaka drdha sneha" – to make seva mindfully and according to the time of day and season.

Shri Mahaprabhuji Vallabhacharya then said to Surdas, "Sur! You have received the fruit of the teachings of the Path of Grace. Remain here on the Govardhan Hill and sing Shri Krishna's endless lilas every day, on all occasions."

At that moment, Shri Nathji had just finished enjoying His evening offerings. Surdas then sang about Shri Radha's annoyance in love with Krishna:

*Clever woman, why won't you speak to Him!
The Lotus-eyed Mountain Holder, Krishna,
makes great efforts to meet you.
Since you beheld that enticing Mohan,
you have forgotten
the abundant pleasures of home.
Sur explains, "Krishna repeats,
'Radhe! O, Radhe!'
His forest garland over here,
His shawl over there."*



Then Surdas sang,

*In the bliss bed, Krishna, King of love,
remains awake all night in intimate embrace,
soaked in amorous mood.
Disheveled clothes, jewelry and hair – They are so lovely,
face to face and chest pressed to breast.
Tired now, Their drooping eyes still shine.
They are entangled, speaking words ablaze in love.
Sings Surdas, "Your glories may be known
in Your father Nanda's house,
but the beloved of Your life is filled
with the pleasure of Your nectar."²⁴*

Finally, the blind poet Surdas sang,

*Taking Radha to His chest, Krishna rests.
The royal couple, brisk and clever in the ways of love,
lie on a new bed filled with fresh flowers.
A female attendant at their door
sings beautifully arranged melodies.
Sings Sur, "Radha blissfully enfolds
Mountain Holder Krishna to her breast."*

From that day, Surdas composed thousands of poems and daily sang them before Shri Nathji, from the time the blessed Lord awoke in the morning until the He took His evening rest.

2. A Board Game

Once, while Surdas was walking with some other bhaktas, he came across a group of five to ten men playing *chopad*, a type of board game. They were so absorbed in



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their game that they were oblivious to any passers-by. Surdas, noticing their engrossment in worldly play, enlightened his fellow Vaishnavas, "Just look! These men's lives are being spent worthlessly. The Lord gave them human birth for the purpose of performing His worship. Instead, they are wasting their life and body, uselessly beating bones! Their gambling is not only scorned in the world, it is stealing and spiritually turns them away from the Lord. Now I will explain the type of 'chopad' game they really should be playing." Surdas then sang,

*O, mind! Understand, think, and consider!
Without devotion, the Lord is difficult to obtain,
so the Vedas loudly proclaim.
Throw the dice of good association.
Then the tongue tastes the essence of His glories.
When you make your score at last,
to the other side you will have passed.
Set aside the seventeen and hear the eighteenth.
Kill the five and shun the lowest three.
Always think quick and cleverly.
Leave lust, anger, pride and greed –
to deceitful women and illusion they lead.
Sings Sur, "Without the worship of Hari's feet –
in frustration, both hands meet."*

After Surdas had finished singing, the Vaishnavas said, "We can't understand your poem! We will only grasp its meaning after you explain it to us."

Surdas then explained, "In chopad, three things are necessary: understanding, thought, and consideration. Similarly, these things are essential if one wants to worship the Lord. As one must understand the rules of chopad in order to play, so one must know about the Lord before

Surdas



worshiping Him. Secondly, as a player thinks in chopad, 'If the dice roll in this certain way, then I will be victorious,' one who thinks about the inexorable, all-destroying nature of time takes the Lord's refuge. Thirdly, as the chopad player carefully considers, 'How shall I move my pieces? With this move, I will not be killed,' etc., a true Vaishnava considers, 'Is this action I am performing good or wicked?' Then, that individual leaves sinful activities and comes to the path of *Bhagavat dharma*, the devotional path.

"In chopad, when a move is made and the dice are thrown, two other players cry out. So in this world, both the Vedas and Puranas loudly declare that, 'The Lord is very difficult to attain; therefore, undertake the limitless devotional practices.' As chopad can only be played when you meet with others, bhakti increases with the association of accomplished devotional practitioners.

"As the great chopad player continually remembers his moves in his mind, thinking, 'I can win the game with this move,' similarly, by keeping the stories of the Lord in her heart, the bhakta utters with her tongue the refined spiritual essence: the Lord's names and stories.

"When a superb move is made in the game of chopad, the pieces cross the board and reach home, and the fear of being killed is abated. Similarly, in this world, it requires a complete move, possible through great merit, for an embodied being to cross over the mundane illusions of samsara. That person uses the body itself to take the refuge of the Lord and cross over samsara.

"Set aside the seventeen and hear the eighteenth.' In chopad, eighteen is a higher score than seventeen. Similarly, setting aside all the other Puranas, one should listen carefully to the eighteenth, namely, the Bhagavata Purana (Shrimad Bhagavatam).



"Five signifies the five senses and their corresponding forms of ignorance, which should be 'killed.' As it is written in the scriptures, '*patanga matanga kuranga bhringa meena hataah panbhireva panch; ekah pramaadi sa katham na hanyate yah sevate shadchabhireva panch.*' The moth meets its demise through its sense of sight, which attracts it to the flame. The elephant is killed through its sense of touch, the deer through its sense of hearing, and the bee through the sense of smell. The fish is killed through its sense of taste. In this way, each one of the senses can kill, so humans who are slaves to all five senses will most certainly be devoured by time. Hence the line, 'Kill the five.' Five is also the number by which the pieces in chopad are defeated.

"The lowest score obtainable in chopad is three points, which no one wants. Three are also the material qualities of *maya* (illusion): *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*.²⁵ The *samsaric* world is like the board on which chopad is played. One should throw the dice cleverly. Here cleverness means that after a toss is made, there is no need to focus on it any longer.

"Just as in chopad the player who loses his sharp intelligence is totally cheated, in the same way, the webs of lust, anger, etc., and the female form – the Lord's power of illusion, swindle the whole world. A person who loses everything in the game of chopad rises beating his hands. Similarly, one who has not been devoted to the Lord's lotus feet beats his hands together for wasting his life and living without kindness." The Vaishnavas were very pleased to hear Surdas' explanation of his poem.



3.

Meeting with the Emperor

When Shri Mahaprabhuji saw Surdas he would say, "Surdas, you are an ocean!" Just as one finds all manner of things in the ocean, so Surdas composed poems in thousands of ways. In his poems, Surdas praises wisdom, renunciation, all the subtle differences of devotion, as well as the Lord's various incarnations and lilas.

After a while, people from all over began to learn to sing Surdas' poems. Once it so happened that Tansen, the famous court singer of Emperor Akbar, learned one of Surdas' poems and sang it before the Emperor.²⁶

Now hear of the devotee's qualities:

Some state his blame, others his fame.

Some beat him and take his wealth.

Some anoint him with sandalwood paste.

Others smear him with mud.

Some say he is a fool, most unrighteous.

Others say he has fine merits.

Good and bad never appear

*in the minds of Krishna's bhaktas,
nor will their loving devotion to His feet
waver for a moment.*

*Says Sur, "Those unaffected by pleasure and pain
meet Mountain Holder Krishna without delay."*

Akbar exclaimed, "What to say! It would be amazing to meet a bhakta like that!"

Tansen then informed the Emperor, "Surdas, the man who composed that poem, lives in Vraj."

'I will meet this Surdas, one way or another,' Akbar resolved. He traveled from Delhi to Agra, where he



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commanded one of his men, "Surdas sings poems to Shrinathji. Go there, and when you have definitely found him, let me know in Mathura. Don't let Surdas know what you are doing."

The messenger arrived in Nathdvara²⁷ and was told that Surdas had gone to Mathura. Proceeding there, the messenger discovered Surdas' whereabouts and observed his routines before informing the Emperor, "Surdas is in Mathura." The Emperor immediately sent five or ten of his men to bring the poet to him. When Surdas was brought before Akbar, the ruler showed him great respect and requested, "You have sung many poems in praise of Lord Vishnu. Now please sing something for me."

Surdas then sang his famous 'Sur Pacheesi' poem of twenty-five verses:

*Oh mind! Adore Madhav!
Leave lust, anger, greed, pride and illusion,
all contrary to love.*

*That black bee, the enjoyer, roamed the forest
and with greed, paid no heed to measure.
After drinking dry each flower he passed by,
the lotus closed and trapped him inside.²⁸*

Listen to love's extent:

*The Chatak bird's mind on water is bent.
In hopes of one cloud he endures all pain,
and in any other season he'll not taste rain.²⁹*

Look at the lotus' story:

*To the sun she sings all glory.
She'll surrender her life-force,
but not her love.*

Surdas



*As she withers, her life undone,
her essence returns to the sun.*

*The moth thinks not of pain
as it flies into the candle flame.
Though its body is ignited and burns in a blaze,
'til the end, its love for the light was unfazed.*

*A fish cannot live without water,
though the water cares not one way or the other.
Now look! Thrown from its home,
death looms for the fish,
Still its love for water does not diminish.*

*The dove was determined in love and took flight,
gazing up toward the sky.
She saw the stars and rose so high,
now lifeless upon the earth she lies.*

*The story of the love of the deer
is one which you should truly hear.
The hunter sounds a captivating melody,
enchanting the deer with his musical trickery.
Unable to resist, she comes closer by steps
'til the hunter's arrow pierces her chest.*

*Observe the ways of the senseless widow,
discarding her body with a ghost.
Her mind not dimmed by the funeral pyre,
she joins her dead husband in the midst of the fire.³⁰*

*The world and Vedas all forbid
the terror seen around every bend.
The thief who won't once in his life quit stealing
will have to withstand a tragic end.*



*Love is the nectar of all nectars;
you dally essentially in worldliness.
Youth, body, mind and wealth have departed,
yet, you still won't admit your losses.*

*You don't have a clue how to make use
of the great jewel you have attained.
After daily hearing the Lord's love-filled stories,
you are still not in the least ashamed?*

*Always keep sacred association,
the soul's prana, its true life force.
Instead, so casually you have forgotten
Hari, the omnipotent Lord of lords.*

*Remember the Vedas and Puranas,
as all gods and trees have followed before us.
You wallow in ignorance with deep delusions.
Why not consider their path and choose it?*

*Consider the bird, deer, fish and moth.
I've investigated every place –
So many beings in the water and on earth.
What else can I say to further state my case?*

*Our totally sacred friend is the Lord,
the Master of prana, life's breath cord.
Supremely compassionate, kind treasure of grace,
in His hands our lives are placed.*

*There was great pain in your mother's womb,
where you had not a single limb.
Listen, ungrateful: the Lord of your life
never left you in that time of strife.*



*Day and night He nourished you continually,
like the betel peddler preserves his leaves so carefully.
Removing all pain, He comforted, soothed,
and provided you mother's milk for food.*

*He who gives even the insentient consciousness,
the Abode of all virtue and essence,
for you, made feet, hands, and nails,
eyes, nose and ears and your senses.*

*He gave you clothing and shelter in varieties,
one after another, great opportunities:
a mother, father and brothers,
new tastes, novel acquaintances.*

*He filled your life with relatives, friends,
a son, wife, wealth, and lands.
Deeply deluded by mundane subjects,
your mind was just ensnared by lust.*

*Fixated on food, drink, and fashion,
your youth is now gone and everything spent.
Having passed the night with a prostitute in passion,
you awake with fear of greater extent.*

*Just as wealth merely increased your enjoyment,
lust was your body's only fulfillment.
With this smoke clouding your eyes,
your true Friend can't be recognized.*

*The whole world found out, and that's when
your infamy began to spread to no end.
So in your time of need, none would intercede;
Yama's servants came 'round and struck you down.³¹*



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*O, ignorant deceased!
Who knows how many times this cycle
of coming and going repeats?
Your love for the Lord was left forgotten,
while the pleasures you sought were rotten.*

*To those who act with no shame in their lives,
what can be said, even one hundred times?
"You didn't lift one finger to worship the Lord;
Ingrate, you're a village scoundrel," sings Sur.*

What is the effect of this poem? This poem is such that if one remembers it, the grace of the Lord will arise, and wisdom will dawn in the mind and heart. There will be renunciation from the mundane world of suffering, and the mind and heart will become attached to the Lord's feet. Then, one will fear impure association and become attached to the enlightened association of satsang. In this way, one's infatuation with the body and senses will decrease, and worldly attachments will be relinquished. Love that is directed towards the Lord, on the other hand, is divine and will increase from reading this poem.

Akbar was very pleased to hear Surdas' poem and thought to himself, 'I will test this poet's devotion. If his shelter in Hari is true, then he will not sing my praises.' He then said to Surdas, "The Lord has given me this great kingdom. Talented artists sing my praises, and I lavish them with wealth and other offerings. You are also very talented. Now please sing something about my greatness. Then you may ask me for whatever you desire." Without hesitation, Surdas then sang,

*There's not a vacant place in my mind and heart.
How could another enter my heart
in the place of Nanda's Son?*

Surdas



*Walking, looking, waking by day,
dreaming by night,
His enticing form never strays from my heart
for a single moment.
All those teachings Uddhava gave
only revealed so many kinds of greed.³²
What can I do? My mind is completely filled with love;
a jug simply cannot contain the ocean.
His body dark and lotus-flower face,
His crooked walk and gentle laugh –
O, how these thirsty eyes are dying,
says Sur, for that very sight.*

Akbar considered, 'He did not sing anything about my glories. He clearly desires nothing from me. He belongs to the supreme Lord and therefore sings only His praises.' Then, reflecting on the last line of Surdas' song, the Emperor asked, "Surdas, you don't have any eyes, so how could they be dying of thirst? What do you mean by this line?"

Surdas replied, "What can you know of these things? Everyone has eyes, but whose eyes truly thirst for the Lord's sight? Those souls whose eyes thirst for the vision of the Lord live in His presence and continuously drink the nectar of His blissful form. Still, they are always thirsty for more."

Akbar continued the discussion, "Surdas' eyes gaze toward the Supreme Lord and actually see Him; they just don't see anything else." Akbar, wishing to reward the poet for his answer, offered Surdas two or four villages and a great deal of wealth, but Surdas didn't accept any of it. Akbar then said to Surdas, "Baba, what is your wish?"

Surdas answered, "From today onward, don't ever call on me again, and don't try to meet me." Surdas then paid his respects to the Emperor and left.



Emperor Akbar had some discrimination, but from where? In a previous birth, he had been a Hindu renunciate by the name of Bal Mukunda Brahmachari. One day he drank some milk without straining it and imbibed a cow's hair. Due to that impurity, he had to take another birth. His yogic attainment was spoiled, and so he had to take another birth outside of the Vedic dharma.

4.

Fake Surdas Poem

Surdas returned to Shri Nathji's temple. Meanwhile, Emperor Akbar returned to Agra and began searching for more of Surdas' poems. He wrote a proclamation in Farsi in which he offered a reward of rupees and many golden coins for the person who would present him with one of Surdas' poems. One pundit named Kavishvara, greedy for the reward, fabricated a Surdas poem and gave it to Akbar, claiming it was an original. The Emperor replied, "This is not one of Surdas' poems. Out of your desire for wealth, you are faking his poetry."

Kavishvara argued, "How do you know it is not one of Surdas' poems? It certainly is!"

Emperor Akbar then took one of Surdas' original poems and copied it onto another piece of paper. Dropping both this authentic poem and the poem Kavishvara had brought him into some water, the Emperor declared, "The Lord will decide the truth of this matter." The poem written by Kavishvara immediately became soaked with water and sank to the bottom, while Surdas' poem remained perfectly dry.

This scenario illustrates that singing poems composed by great bhaktas who have realized the Lord enables one to cross the



worldly ocean of suffering. Those who sing the clever, worldly poems of mundane poets, on the other hand, will sink into samsara.

After this embarrassment, Pandit Kavishvara returned home with his head held low in shame.

5.

Cradle Songs

Surdas performed Shri Nathji's kirtan seva, singing to his beloved Lord in the temple for many days. Whenever the other poets Kumbhandas or Paramananda Das received the opportunity to sing before Shri Nathji, Surdas would go to Gokul to have the darshan of Shri Navanita Priyaji. On one such occasion, Surdas sang many poems about the Lord's childhood lilas, which Shri Gusainji was very pleased to hear. Afterwards, Shri Gusainji composed a poem in Sanskrit depicting the Lord swinging in His cradle and taught it to Surdas. The next time Child Krishna was swinging in His cradle during the midmorning darshan, Surdas sang that poem:

*While resting in the cradle, infant Krishna removes,
with His exceedingly lovely glance,
the pangs of separation that the Gopis
have experienced for a very long time.
Infant Krishna coos and smiles,
revealing a row of lovely, tiny teeth.
Our life's supreme pinnacle of desire
arises in Your name.
When a single glance from Krishna's infant form
is able to remove the Gopis' annoyance in love,*



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*just imagine what desires Krishna will create
in those intimate dairymaids
when He is older!*

*The Gopis become excited when infant Krishna
crawls on their golden breasts with His two feet.*

*Then the Lord repeatedly tries to stand
on His own two delicate, soft feet.*

*Infant Krishna's brow has been marked
with a sandalpaste tilak.*

*His hair is adorned with various jewels and pearls.
Krishna's ornaments are resplendent.*

*His innocent, nectar-filled
dark-moon face quivers.*

*Mother Yashoda puts a lovely dot on His forehead
to ward off evil eyes.*

*His eyebrows appear like love's bow,
made of lines of nectar-drinking black bees.*

It is all so resplendent and brings forth beloved pleasure.

*Infant Krishna's speech, generous laugh,
and natural smile are filled with nectar
and remove all afflictions.*

*Sings Shri Vitthalesh, "Nourish us always,
your intimate followers."*

After singing Shri Gusainji's composition, Surdas was inspired to write many similar poems in praise of Child Krishna, but in the language of Vrajbhasha. The following poem is one example:

Krishna is so lovely lying in the cradle.

*The delighted Gopis swing Him,
their Lord of love.*

*Overflowing with the bliss of love, the Gopis
rock child Krishna, in whom their desires lie.*

Surdas



*When enchanted Krishna smiles at them, His teeth shine.
His anklet bells jingle melodiously.*

*His forehead is adorned with a black dot
and His brow marked with a saffron tilak.*

*His eyes, embellished with collyrium,
pierce the heart like love's arrows.*

*With His hands, He delightfully brushes
the curly locks from His face.*

*Child Krishna abashes all other forms of pleasure
and at that moment,*

removes the Gopis' annoyance in love.

*He grants those dairymaids oceans of delight
in their hearts and minds.*

*Beholding that beauty, Sur offers his
body and mind, then and there.³³*

Surdas then sang two more poems depicting the Lord's childhood lilas:

O, Sakhi! Look at this astounding form.

*Behold in the middle of a lotus,
twenty globs of butter.*

*Two water bugs in a row
and two incomparable suns.*

Seeing five lotuses nearby, she exclaims, 'What a form!'

*Who could have imagined such splendor
displayed in childhood?*

*Sings Sur, 'Keep the beauty of Shri Gopal
close to your heart.'*

Then he sang,

Just look at this beauty!

*Above the ocean's son sits a swan
covered with seven colorful bugs.*



*The curd's son is given to the ocean's son.
Says Surdas, "A parrot is tasting
what the lotus' son's carrier eats."³⁴*

Surdas continued to sing many poems in front of Shri Navanita Priyaji. Shri Gusainji and his eldest son, Shri Girdharji, as well as his other brothers began to notice that, "In whatever fashion we arrange Shri Navanita Priyaji's ornamentation, Surdas then describes it exactly in his poems! Surdas is truly blessed."

6.

Surdas is Tested

Some time later, Shri Gusainji proceeded to Shri Nathji's temple. Surdas was also considering going to Nathdvara, but Shri Girdharji and Shri Gusainji's other sons approached him and said, "Surdasji! Stay for two more days and sing kirtan for Shri Navanita Priyaji, then go back to Nathdvara." So, Surdas remained in Gokul.

Shri Govindarayaji, Shri Balakrishnaji, and Shri Gokulnathji then said to their elder brother, Shri Girdharji, "This Surdas! Whatever ornamentation is offered to Shri Navanita Priyaji, he praises those exact ornaments and clothes. Offer Child Krishna some unusual, exceptional ornamentation without letting Surdas know what it is, and then we will see how he sings about it."

Shri Girdharji answered them, "Surdas is a great devotee. He experiences the Lord's blissful form within his heart, and therefore he will correctly describe in his song whatever ornamentation you have offered Krishna. It is not proper to test a bhakta like Surdas."

The three brothers contended, "The idea to do this has arisen in our hearts, so there is no harm in doing it."



Shri Girdharji then agreed, "In the morning, we will make some special ornamentations."

The following morning, the three brothers entered the temple, bathed, and then awoke Lord Navanita Priyaji and offered Him breakfast. After bathing Child Krishna, they decided not to put any clothes on Him, because it was a very hot day during the month of Ashaad (around June). They adorned Him only with two strings of pearls around His head, pearl arm bands, a pearl belt, anklets and necklaces made of pearls, earrings, a tilak, nose ring, and no clothes.

Surdas was sitting just outside of the temple's inner sanctuary at that moment, and he realized in his heart that Shri Navanita Priyaji was adorned in an exceptional fashion. He thought, "I have never seen or even heard of this type of ornamentation! The Lord is wearing only pearls and no clothes. Today I will sing a special song to match His unusual adornment."

When the temple opened for Shringaar darshan, Shri Girdharji called out to Surdas, "Surdasji! Behold the Lord and sing a kirtan." Surdas then sang the following poem:

Just look! Hari is totally nude!

He is adorned with pearls and no clothes.

The beauty of His form creates waves.

His every limb is filled with nectarous beauty.

*Seeing that sweetness, equal to a million love-gods,
even Cupid's wife, Rati is shamed.³⁵*

Sings Surdas, "Smearing His face with butter,

He is laughing with the Gopis."³⁶

After hearing that poem, all the brothers were very moved and asked Surdas, "What have you just sung?"



Surdas replied, "Maharaj! I have sung about Child Krishna in the same amazing way as you have ornamented Him."

Hearing his reply, the brothers were very pleased with Surdas and reflected, "He is a blessed follower of Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya. The Lord reveals Himself to Surdas in his heart everyday."

Afterwards, Shri Girdharji took Surdas to Shri Nathji's temple and recounted the entire event to his father. Shri Gusainji replied, "What can be said of Surdasji? This is not surprising. He is like a giant freight ship in the Path of Grace. The experience of the Lord's lilas arises within him twenty-four hours a day."

Surdas was such a vessel of Shri Mahaprabhuji's grace and an accomplished devotee.

7.

Thirsty Surdas

A Vrajvasi boy named Gopal used to serve Surdas. Once, when Surdas was about to take his meal, he asked Gopal to bring him some water. Gopal told Surdas, "Go ahead and sit down, and I will bring your water." Then he went outside to gather some cowdung. He met a few Vaishnavas and became so absorbed in conversation that he completely forgot about Surdas' water. Meanwhile, Surdas began eating, and suddenly, a piece of food got stuck in his throat. Surdas felt around for a glass of water with his left hand but could not find any. With food stuck in his throat and unable to call out for help, Surdas panicked. Knowing of his plight, Shri Nathji left His temple and brought Surdas some water from His own golden water pitcher. Surdas drank from the pitcher.



When Gopal realized that he had forgotten to bring water for Surdas, he ran back, only to find that Surdas had finished his meal. He asked, "You have gotten up from your meal without drinking any water? I was talking to some bhaktas and forgot to bring your water."

Surdas replied, "How can you call yourself Gopal? Only Shri Nathji is the true Gopal. He protected me today. A piece of food got stuck in my throat and I could not even cry out. I panicked. At that moment, a water pitcher came into my hand, and I drank from it. I thought you must have given it to me, but now you say that you weren't even here. It must have been the Gopal who resides in the temple. Go see what the pitcher looks like."

Gopal went to the place where Surdas had taken his meal and there found Shri Nathji's golden pitcher. He picked it up, brought it to Surdas, and said, "This is a water pitcher from the temple!"

Surdas reprimanded him, "You have done a terrible thing to cause Shri Nathji such hardship. For my sake, Shri Nathji had to come with His pitcher of water. Now, take good care of that pitcher, and when Shri Gusainji awakes from his rest, give the pitcher to him."

Gopal went before Shri Gusainji, bowed respectfully, and placed Shri Nathji's pitcher in front of the Bhakti Master. Shri Gusainji questioned, "How did you get that pitcher? It belongs to Shri Govardhan Dhar (Shri Nathji)."

Gopal confessed, "Maharaj! The fault is mine," and related all the events as they had occurred. Shri Gusainji immediately arose and bathed. He entered the temple, cleaned the golden pitcher, and after dressing it with a new cloth, filled it with water. As he presented the pitcher to Shri Nathji, he said, "Today You came to Surdas' rescue. Who else but You will protect the Vaishnavas?"



Shri Nathji replied, "A piece of food got stuck in Surdas' throat. When he started to panic, I brought him My water."

Here Shri Nathji reveals, "When Surdas panicked, so did I. Know that the bhaktas are My very self."

Later that afternoon, when the temple doors opened, Surdas went to have the Lord's darshan. After Shri Gusainji made the afternoon food offerings he mentioned to Surdas, "Today Shri Nathji has truly blessed you."

Surdas replied, "It all happened through your grace. Otherwise, how would the Lord have taken note of a fallen soul like myself? Shri Nathji accepts us through the graceful intercession of Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya."

Shri Gusainji praised Surdas, "You are really a great devotee. Only pure-hearted souls can possess such humility."

Surdas was truly a vessel of his guru's grace.

8. The Grocer

Just below Shri Nathji's temple on the Govardhan Hill, in the village of Gopalpur (Nathdvara), there lived a grocer who was very greedy and attached to his household life. The grocer's shop was just at the foot of the Govardhan Hill, but he never went to have Shri Nathji's darshan and had not taken initiation from Shri Gusainji.

Every morning as he opened his shop, he would ask the first Vaishnava who came down from the temple what Shri Nathji was wearing that day. When other bhaktas came to his shop, the grocer would exclaim, "What amazing ornamentation Shri Nathji wore today! What a divine darshan!"



The grocer spoke to all of his Vaishnava clients in this cunning manner, but he never once went up to see Shri Nathji himself. Just to impress the Vaishnavas and increase business, he wore the Vaishnava *tilak* mark on his forehead and the sacred tulsi necklace. In front of the Vaishnavas, he would tell stories of Krishna's divine love. Everyone was pleased with this and, thinking him to be a real devotee, purchased goods from him. In this deceitful way, he swindled the Vaishnavas by making a show of his faith. He acquired a great deal of wealth but never spent any of it. That grocer carried on like this until he was sixty years old.

One day, he called out to Surdas, who was passing by, "Surdasji! Today, the Lord Shri Nathji is ornamented so beautifully!" The grocer continued, "You have never purchased goods from me or even come to my shop, and you are such a great Vaishnava! What offense have I committed that you do not buy from me? This shop is yours; I am the Vaishnavas' servant, so please grace me."

Surdas thought, "This grocer talks so sweetly, but behind that, he is really greedy and deceitful. Now I will free him of his devious ways. He has never seen Shri Nathji. Now I will bring him to see Shri Krishna, and then I will make him a bhakta."

Considering thus, Surdas told him, "I know that you have never seen Shri Nathji and that you are not a Vaishnava. That is why I have never stopped at your shop. Tell me the truth; have you ever had the sight of Shri Nathji?"

Hearing that, the grocer felt ashamed and said, "Please don't mention this in front of anyone else! How can I leave my work to go to the temple? If a customer came to buy something and I am not here, he will go to another shop. If I lose that business, where will I get the



money to feed myself? Also, there is no one who will inform me when the temple opens, in which case I could quickly run up and have darshan."

Surdas replied, "If I come here and tell you when the temple is open, will you come to see Shri Nathji?"

The grocer agreed, "If you come and tell me at the appropriate time, I will go with you. I am very anxious to see Krishna."

Surdas said, "I will come back in the afternoon then," and continued on his way. That afternoon, when the temple conch was blown to announce Shri Nathji's Utthapan darshan, Surdas went to the grocer and said, "The conch has sounded, so it is time to see Shri Nathji. Let's go."

The grocer explained, "This is time when local people come to buy their goods. Let me know when it is time for the late afternoon Bhog darshan."

Surdas proceeded up the mountain to the temple, where he sang before Shri Nathji. When it was time for Bhog darshan, Surdas came down from the Govardhan Hill and told the grocer, "It is time for darshan, so come on."

The grocer replied, "Surdasji, this is the time when all the cows return from the forest. If I go up to the temple, the cows will come and eat all my grains. Call me for the evening worship, the Shayan Arati darshan. By then, the cows will have all returned home."

Surdas then returned to the temple for Bhog and Sandhya darshans. Afterwards he went back to the grocer and said, "Let's go. The evening darshan is about to open."

The grocer replied, "Surdasji, today you have troubled yourself greatly for me, but this is the time of day to light the candles. The goddess of wealth, Shri Lakshmi, comes at this time. If there are no lights in my shop, She



will just pass by my shop. And what will I do if someone comes and steals some wheat while I am out? I'll go in the morning for darshan before I open the shop. Come and tell me when it is time for Mangala darshan in the morning. Today I have made you run all around."

Surdas then returned to the temple and sang evening kirtans for the blessed Lord. The next morning, after Surdas bathed, he went to the grocer and said, "It is time for Mangala darshan, come on!"

The grocer explained, "Surdasji, this is the time I must sweep the shop. And if the first customer leaves without buying anything, it means that it will be a very slow day for business, and I won't get any more customers. So I will watch the shop until it is time for the mid-morning Shringaar darshan, and then I will go for darshan. Come and tell me when it is time for that darshan."

Surdas proceeded up to the temple and had Mangala Arati darshan. When he returned to the grocer to tell him it was time for Shri Nathji's Shringaar darshan, the grocer made the excuse, "I have not done well this morning, and there are many cows roaming about. I will certainly come for the midday Rajbhog darshan. Because you are a great devotee, for my sake you have come back and forth to my shop so many times."

Surdas then climbed the Hill, had Shri Nathji's darshan, and sang Shringaar kirtans for Him. When the midday Rajbhog Arati darshan was about to open, Surdas once again came to the grocer and said, "Now will you come?"

The grocer replied, "How could I come now? All the Vaishnavas are coming down from the temple and will buy their goods for the day. As I am an old man, I cannot quickly run up to the temple for Shri Nathji's darshan. This is the most profitable time of the day for my shop. I will go for the afternoon Utthapan darshan."



For three days Surdasji continued to go to the grocer, and he continued to make up such excuses. He was greedy for money and therefore never went with Surdas to see Shri Nathji. On the morning of the fourth day, after bathing and setting out for the temple, Surdas thought, "For three days now, this grocer has avoided coming with me to see Shri Nathji, despite my repeated requests. If he refuses again today, I will give him a cause for concern that will persuade him to go for darshan."

Approaching the grocer, Surdas told him, "For three days now, I have returned to your shop, but you have never come for Shri Nathji's darshan. Today, come for the morning darshan."

The grocer replied, "After I have done a bit of business this morning, I will come for the mid-morning Shringaar darshan."

Surdas then said to the grocer, "Now I will reveal your nature to all the Vaishnavas: 'This grocer is a total liar. He has never had the darshan of Shri Nathji and is not even a Vaishnava.' If any Vaishnava comes to your shop to buy something, I will sing verses, choruses, poems, and songs to them about your cunning ways." With that, Surdas then sang a poem to the grocer:

*Today work, tomorrow work,
and the day after, you'll work again.*

*The first day you worked so much,
you lost interest in the Lord's feet.*

*While waking you work, and you work in your sleep,
and after that you'll die.*

*Leave your work and remember Shyam!
Sur proclaims, 'This is true shelter.'*

Hearing this, the grocer grew afraid and fell at Surdas' feet, pleading, "Please never repeat such songs and



rhymes about me! Please don't tell anyone about me! I will go with you right now to see Shri Nathji!"

Surdas then took the grocer up to Shri Nathji's temple for the morning darshan. When the temple doors opened, Surdas said to Shri Nathji, "Maharaj! This merchant is one of Your divine souls. Attract his mind and uplift him; he lives under Your flag."

Shri Nathji replied, "He lives close to Me, but what does he know of Me? I can only be found with the grace of great devotees."

Many creatures live in the waters of the sacred Yamuna and Ganga Rivers, but they do not become accomplished through their contact with the holy waters. In the Lord's creation, is every fly, ant and mosquito liberated? It is through the association of other devotees that souls become spiritually accomplished and can find the Lord. Through their association, one can develop 'Das-bhava,' the sentiment of being Hari's humble follower. Then, grace arises.

Shri Nathji then revealed Himself to that grocer and charmed his heart and mind. After the Mangala darshan closed, the grocer clutched Surdas' feet and said, "My entire life has been wasted in piling up wealth. I have a great deal of money. Now we will donate it wherever you want. Make me a Vaishnava disciple of Shri Gusainji."

Surdas replied, "Bathe and return here without touching anything."

By the time the grocer returned, Shri Gusainji had finished ornamenting Shri Nathji. Surdas approached Shri Gusainji and requested, "Accept this grocer as your disciple."

Shri Gusainji replied, "Surdasji, you have tamed a sixty year old bull! Without you, this grocer would have lived his entire life like that."



Shri Gusainji called the grocer, sat him down close to Shri Nathji, and initiated him with the refuge and dedication mantras. The grocer's mind then became purified. From that day, he made a point to go for all the daily darshans in the temple. He made generous offerings to Shri Gusainji and also gave clothes, foodstuffs, ornaments, and other offerings to Shri Nathji.

One day the grocer requested of Surdas, "Surdasji, through your grace I received the sight of Shri Nathji and became a bhakta. Now shower me with grace that will make the Lord accept me in this life and free me from the worldly bonds of happiness and pain." Surdas then composed the following poem and taught it to the grocer:

Remembering Krishna purifies the body. Remember Him as long as you live in this dream world. Your breaths are all numbered, and fear approaches when they are spent. One who fails to consider the nature of this illusion is never freed from the cycles of birth.

If you plant the seed of discrimination, you will never sleep again in the fire of the womb. Repeatedly I explain to you, the moment which passes will never come again. Deceitful women allure your senses while the seconds tick the hours away. While counting the end draws near. You have left the treasure and are all alone. Now why feel despair? A tree won't bear fallen leaves. The wind picks them up and blows them away; they never return. The Lord makes others grow in their place.

The birds and beasts of earth, pigs and insects, all wander about for ages before attaining human birth. Even after attaining human birth, the mind is overtaken with worldly love and forgets the priceless jewel, reaching instead for a piece of glass. He never sings the praises of the blessed Lord, and his mind wanders in ten directions. Distorted perception fills his heart. He thinks he is a hero and desires everything.



In the heavens, nether worlds and kingdoms of earth, the prideful man is never satisfied. Spending all his time like this, he reaches his end without wisdom. Sometimes he meets and celebrates with a friend, at other times with lovely, shy girls. Sometimes he sits in a chariot drawn by elephants or horses. Other times he rests in a fragrant flower bed. Royal umbrellas and horsetail whisks are waved above him. At other times, he hunts and kills animals. Sometimes festoons and canopies are arrayed around him. Other times, enraged elephants battle before him. Young lady attendants stand at attention by his door, while his desires increase hundred fold. Fine clothes, luscious fruits and fragrant flowers abound and young women afford him numerous pleasures. One thousand doors lead to his palace, with brave guards on watch everywhere.

In this dalliance, the night passes unknown. Drinking maya, he becomes intoxicated with pride. Concerned only with his sons, money, and wife, he awakes only when death arrives. Now, there are no more partners in his false play – no more drummers by the door, nor horses and elephants. In a moment, the king becomes a beggar. Now why can't his heart withstand the pain of his faults? He has become an orphan without a Lord. The warrior's arrows are aimed at him. He amassed so much karma in his human birth and now suffers greatly at death's door. For the sake of the body, he killed other beings, so his tongue could taste the six different flavors! That same body died and became a frightening ghost. Everyone cries out, "Ghost, ghost! Cast it out of the city!" He murdered for the nourishment of a body which ultimately became ashes and feces. Twenty four hours a day, feeding his senses with deadly poison, while turned away from the Lord's feet.

Awake, awake! Where are you? You call this illusory dream 'all mine.' Who else but Krishna can liberate you? He is compassionate and has called you in your old age. Don't take the support of other deities. They talk of fine food but don't



deliver. Your life has passed in desires which like a mirage, can never satisfy. What other gods can afford bliss? Who besides Krishna is capable of liberating you? The god of redemption says, "Listen to your deeds: Have you forgotten about your lustful ways?"

In the womb, the Lord protected you. He removed your doubts and made you fearless. He gave you hands, feet, eyes, nose, mouth, and blood as well as every pleasure. Still, you don't see that pleasure as a dream, and you avoid the Lord of Life. How many arrows can one stand, O, sinner? Of all the Vedic teachings, you learned not one. Countless times human life attained, yet you have forsaken the Lord's way and follow a godless path. When your time has expired, the end is disheartening. Now you will not find human birth again. You have turned your back to the real master. Now what true pursuit can you attain?

You found a wishing stone and then threw it in the ocean. After realizing what you gave away, you beat your head in frustration. You left a wishing stone for a shell? Listen to the boundless extent of His kindness. The Lord gave a wish-fulfilling tree, and you cut its roots. Now how will you find that tree? Hari gave a plate full of sweet food, but you left it to taste poison. You left the birthless One and abandoned the wish-fulfilling cow. Leave the elephant's strength and seek the Lord's!

Without Krishna, you have wasted this body, tormented like a chained circus monkey. Why not perform deeds like the sages Suka, Sanaka and Sanandana have done? Gods, men, sages and even demons have all worshipped Hari's feet; they are all the Lord's followers. Encircle Him and bow your head. Then worldly desires will not plague you. One who worships Krishna like this finds great pleasure.

Fool, have you forgotten this? His name has uplifted countless sinners and removes life's karmas and afflictions. Bhaktas are fearless and discover the treasures of devotion. The snake of time never devours them.



All of life is firmly established in Krishna's name: He gives supreme liberation from the disturbances of the diseased world. Know that the Shrimad Bhagavatam is the supreme benefactor. Sur, the beggar, is singing by Hari's door, "Foremost of sinners, take Hari's shelter! Krishna, grant that gift which bestows fearlessness: the dust of Your feet."³⁷

As Surdas sang these sixty couplets, firm devotion arose within the grocer's heart. All of his worldly desires were sundered. He received wisdom, renunciation, and then attained the ultimate reward of devotion to Hari. He became attached to Shri Nathji's lotus feet and directly experienced the bliss of the Lord's form. That grocer remained absorbed in the nectar of devotion. Through Surdas' association, such a greedy man became accomplished. Surdas was that much of an accomplished being.

How did this come to be? The grocer was actually a divine soul and in the Lila is Shri Lalitaji's close associate, Viraja. After finding the association of Surdas, he experienced the Lila. Association with great souls is therefore the supreme path.

9.

Bhaktas' Reunion

Once, the poet Paramananda Das, accompanied by ten or fifteen other Vaishnavas, traveled from Gokul to Nathdvara in order to visit Surdasji and have Shri Nathji's darshan. After the evening Arati darshan, they went to Surdas. He welcomed them with great respect and then sang the following kirtan:



Krishna's Inner Circle

*A moment with Krishna's bhaktas
surpasses the pleasures of a million heavens
and liberations by the billions.
Krishna's grace arises as the fruit for one
whose good fortune abounds,
and who has amassed great merit.
Sings Sur,
"Praises to the greatness of those devotees' feet
is found in the Shrimad Bhagavatam."*

Then Surdas sang,

*When Krishna's followers become pleased with you,
then you can truly behold the Vaishnavas
and become freed of all sins.
Filled with Hari's lilas, all inferior hankerings
in one's heart are destroyed.
Sur has definitely decided:
It is then that Krishna can be known.*

Surdas continued with this poem:

*Hari's bhaktas are extremely exalted.
Kings, great sages, gods and holy men
are humbled when they see them.
Bhaktas make a throne for their Lord
with their firm faith.
Their pure praise of Shri Krishna is a royal umbrella,
covering Him with unprecedented glory.
Firm faith is their kingdom and truly inspires the people.
Lust, anger, pride, infatuation, and greed
are the thieves.
Bhaktas drink deeply of the love nectar they have
for Shri Krishna's lotus feet.³⁸*

Surdas



*They are enthusiastic in their devotion.
The minister in that kingdom is knowledge.
He has no time to speak of doubts.
Mundane riches and lust avoid the bhaktas,
while dharma and liberation bow their heads.
Humility and wisdom are the amazing door guards
who never take leave.
The eight supernatural powers stand by the gate
with their hands folded,
cherishing the bhaktas in their hearts.
The royal cane bearers are happy renunciates
who turn away the unwanted.
Maya and time can't touch those
who have understood the ways of love.
Says Surdas, "Understand that to attain human birth
is the grace of the guru."*

Surdas then sang,

*The day saints arrive in your life,
The fruit of a billion sacred baths
is achieved by their very sight.
Then, one's face shines every day and
one's mind meditates upon the Lord's lotus feet.
Speech, mind and action know of nothing else.
Those blessed ones remember Krishna, and
He remembers them.
Free from falsehood and obstructions,
those blessed ones sing the pure glories.
Says Surdas, "Love those who make you
remember the Lord."*

Surdas sang a number of poems with a similar theme and all the bhaktas were very delighted with him. Then Surdas said, "Bless me with your thoughts."



They requested, "Please tell us about knowledge, yoga, the supreme essence and what it is like to love the Lord." Surdas then sang,

*None have come across the Lord
through the path of Yoga.
Brahma, acting on His command,
took a very austere stand,
but was he ever once enchanted
by the flavor of the Rasa dance?
Shiva used Yoga as his method to meditate
on the divine essence,
but did Krishna ever place His arm on his neck
or serenade him sweetly in intimate embrace?
The great sage Bagadaval was never given
even a single blade of grass for shade,
but when the residents of Vraj
were troubled by Indra's rains,
Krishna held up the Govardhan Mountain above them.
The Brahmin sage Durvasaha, filled with austerities,
lived by eating only grass,
but when the sage was scorched by the Sudarshana discus,
did the Lord offer to swallow that blaze?
The sage Markande did great austerities
and wandered to the ocean.
Only after seven eons passed did Hari come
to free him from the water god Varuna's trap.
The Vedas constantly declare
that the compassion filled Lord
removes the bhakta's separation.
Sings Sur, "Udhava, how can we listen to yoga teachings
when our hearts are filled with love
for Shyam (Krishna)?"*



Everyone was thrilled to hear Surdas' poem and proclaimed, "Abundant grace has been showered over Surdas." After they all had Shri Nathji's darshan the next morning, Surdas returned to Gokul. Surdas was truly a vessel of Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya's grace.

10. Surdas' 125,000 Poems

After Surdas had sang in Shri Nathji's service for many years, he realized that the Lord wished for him to return to His eternal realm. Such is the Lord's design. When He wants to manifest in this world from the eternal realm of Vaikuntha, He first sends His associates down to earth. Then He appears and plays with them here before bringing them back to His divine Lila abode.

Before Shri Krishna incarnated here, He first arranged for His parents, the Gopis, His friends, Vasudeva, Devaki, as well as the entire Yadava clan to appear in this world. Then He manifested in this world and made lila here. Much later, He arranged for the Yadava clan to be totally destroyed in a very mundane play, but He kept His parents and the Gopis from seeing that part of the lila.

Shri Vallabhacharya and his son Shri Gusainji are incarnations of Purna Purushottama Shri Krishna. Many other divine souls with connection to the Lila appeared upon this earth along with them. Shri Vallabhacharya and Shri Gusainji made sure that before they left for the Lila that their followers had been reconnected to the divine abode. They did not allow their followers to see their worldly passing. Shri Gusainji told his intimate disciple Chachaji just before he left this world, "Go to Gujarat." After Chachaji left, Shri Gusainji left this physical world. Accordingly, it was Shri Nathji's own wish to call Surdasji back to the eternal Lila.



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Surdas considered, "I have vowed to compose 125,000 poems before leaving this world. So far, I have composed 100,000. If it is the Lord's wish, I will compose twenty five thousand more poems. Then I will cast off this physical body."

Just then, Shri Nathji appeared directly before Surdas, saying, "Surdasji, your heart's desire to compose 125,000 poems has already been completed. I have finished the remaining 25,000 poems – look in your poem book."

Surdas then asked one Vaishnava to look through his poetry book. Examining the book, he found amongst Surdas' poems 25,000 new poems signed 'Sur Shyam.' The Vaishnava told Surdas, "Yesterday there were no poems signed by Sur Shyam, but today, in the middle of your other poems, there are twenty five thousand new poems bearing that name! They encompass all the lilas of the Lord."

Surdas then bowed to Shri Nathji and said, "Through Your grace, the desires of my heart have been fulfilled. Now, I will follow Your commands."

The Lord replied, "Now return to My Lila and experience the nectar of My love," and then disappeared.

Surdas then bowed to Shri Krishna and experienced great bliss. The two ordinary Vaishnavas sitting next to Surdas did not realize that Shri Nathji had appeared to Surdas and spoken to Him, for the direct experience of Shri Krishna's form is awarded only to accomplished, intimate devotees.

11.

Surdas' Passing

When Surdas realized it was the Lord's wish that he return to His eternal abode, he went to the divine town of Parasoli. There Shri Krishna danced the eternal Rasa Lila with the



Surdas

Gopis, as described in the Shrimad Bhagavatam. In Parasoli, the celestial moon appeared above the Moon Lake, Chandra Sarovar.

The eight "Ashta Chaap" are the adhikaris in charge of the seva at eight 'doors' in the Govardhan Hill. The poets each passed through their corresponding doors when they left their physical bodies, attaining divine forms that eternally join in Shri Krishna's Lila play.

The first of these doors is above Govinda Lake, across from Parasoli and Chandra Sarovar, the Moon Lake. This is Surdas' door, where he is the head of the seva. Chita Swami's door is at Apsara Lake. At Surabhi Lake, Paramananda Das is in charge of the door. Govinda Swami presides at the entrance near Kadambakandhi. Chaturbhujadas' door is near the Rudra Lake. Krishnadas presides over the door at Bilachu Lake, on the road to the Rasa Lila. Nandadas' portal is at Manasi Ganga Lake, and Kumbhandas' door is across from Anyor at the town of Yamunavati.

In this amazing fashion, eight doors lead to the eternal inner-bower lilas which take place within the Govardhan Hill. The eight Ashtachhap poets have both 'Sakha' forms as Shri Krishna's close friends, and also 'sakhi' forms as Gopis, with which they remain forever engaged in the service of the Divine Couple.

Arriving at Parasoli, Surdas bowed down towards the flag on top of Shri Nathji's temple and lay down to sleep. He thought to himself, "Shri Mahaprabhuji and Shri Gusainji have bestowed their supreme grace upon me and given me the experience of Shri Nathji's lilas in this birth. Still, it would be my great fortune if Shri Gusainji would bless me with his darshan now. One of his names is 'Ocean of Grace.' He fulfills the desires of his bhaktas, and so he will fulfill mine."



While Surdas was contemplating upon the form of the bhakti master, Shri Gusainji was ornamenting Shri Nathji and thought to himself, "I did not see Surdas in the temple singing kirtan this morning." He asked one of the sevaks in the temple, "Where is Surdasji?"

One Vaishnava replied, "After Mangala Arati this morning, Surdas said 'Jai Shri Krishna' to all the bhaktas and then left for Parasoli." Shri Gusainji then knew that it was the Lord's wish to call Surdas back to His lila. Shri Gusainji told all the Vaishnavas present, "A giant freight ship of the Pushti Marg is about to depart, and if you wish to take anything from it, then go and see Surdas. I will go just after waving the midday Arati lights." All the Vaishnavas then proceeded to Parasoli to meet with Surdas.

As a merchant fills an ocean ship with his goods for business purposes, so Surdas' heart was filled with an array of divine things. That is why Shri Gusainji called him a freight ship.

At that time, Surdas stopped speaking and fixed his mind and heart upon the divine forms of Shri Gusainji and Shri Nathji. Shri Gusainji sent fifteen local Vraj Vasis ahead, saying, "Run and see what has happened to Surdas, and report back to me within half an hour." They quickly returned and informed Shri Gusainji, "Maharaj, now Surdas is not speaking to anyone!"

After waving the Rajbhog Arati lights before Shri Nathji, Shri Gusainji proceeded to Parasoli, accompanied by Ramdas, Kumbhandas, Govinda Swami, Chaturdas and some other Vaishnavas. When they arrived at Parasoli, Shri Gusainji saw that Surdas was unconscious and had no bodily awareness. He then took hold of Surdas' hand and said, "Surdasji, how are you?"



Surdas immediately regained his senses and bowed down to his guru, saying, "Baba! You have come? I was looking for you. Now you have blessed me with supreme grace and given me your darshan. Maharaj! I was just contemplating your divine form." Then Surdas sang the following poem:

*Look! Behold Krishna's beautiful disposition:
He is deeply profound, an ocean of benevolence,
the crown king of wisdom.
For a sesame seed's worth of worship, He gives
His devotees rewards equal to Mount Meru.
Sins which would fill ten oceans,
He doesn't count as even a drop.
See Hari's joyous face and lotus feet
when you are before Him.
Even after turning away, if you look at Him again,
by the grace of that face,
He still looks blissfully the same.
When bhaktas suffer His intense separation,
that compassionate One chases after them.
Says Surdas, "Whoever turns his back
to that blessed Lord has lost all fortune."*

After hearing that poem, Shri Gusainji said, "When Shri Thakurji gives His intimate bhaktas the gift of such humility, understand that they have been fully graced. Surdasji is a vessel of the nectar of that humility."

At that time, Chaturbhujadas said to all the Vaishnavas who had come with Shri Gusainji, "Surdas is truly a great devotee and has composed over 100,000 poems in praise of Shri Thakurji, but he has never sung the glories of Shri Mahaprabhuji."

Hearing that, Surdas replied, "I have sung *only* Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya's glories! Had I seen any



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difference between Mahaprabhuji and Lord Krishna, I would have praised them separately. But since you asked, know that all of my kirtans are in accordance with this one:

*I have firm faith in Shri Vallabh's lotus feet.
Without the moonbeams that shine from His toenails,
the entire world falls into darkness.
In this age of struggle, there is no other practice
by which to attain true liberation.
Sings Sur, I may be blind in two ways,
but I am His priceless servant.*

In this poem, Surdas openly revealed his heart. By the word 'faith,' he means that the soul should have firm faith in the shelter of the feet. He says, 'My firm faith is in Shri Acharyaji's lotus feet. Without the divine, jewel-like brilliance that shines from the ten toenails on Shri Acharyaji's lotus feet, all the three worlds are engulfed in darkness.' Such is Surdasji's explanation of firm faith.

He further explains, 'In these times, there is no method to attain the divine reward except for shelter in Shri Acharyaji's feet. So how could I praise anything else? Just as one who thinks Shri Krishna and His consort, Shri Swaminiji are two different forms is ignorant, if I were to see a difference between Shri Govardhandhar (Shri Krishna) and Shri Acharyaji, that duality would leave me in darkness. Therefore I remain their priceless follower.'

What is the meaning of 'priceless?' – it refers to one who acts only out of bhava. Similarly, in the Rasa Lila portions of the Shrimad Bhagavatam, in the Gopi Gita, the Gopis call themselves, 'priceless followers,' because their devotion is divine; hence no price can be placed on it. Those who practice devotion with desire for some form of wealth are not priceless servants,

Surdas



and their devotion is not of the highest level. That is why devotion which is devoid of desire for compensation is the best of all, and those who have it are priceless servants. Their bhava is enough to satisfy the Lord. The Lord Himself tells the Gopis in that section of the Bhagavatam, 'Your worship of Me is such that I can never repay it; I will always remain indebted to you.' That is the nature of priceless devotional service.

Surdasji composed this poem with the same deep devotional mood with which he wrote the rest of his collection of 125,000 poems, so to sing this one is equal to reciting them all.

Shri Gusainji then remarked, "Surdas' heart is filled with bhava – divine love for Lord Krishna. That is why Shri Mahaprabhuji called Surdas an ocean. As the depth of the ocean is fathomless, so is Surdas' devotional heart."

Chaturbhujadas then questioned, "Surdas, who besides you will reveal to us this divine love? Teach us now something about the real form of Shri Mahaprabhuji's Path of Grace and how we can experience its nectar." Surdas then sang,

*Worship love-filled Krishna
with the devotional mood of the Gopis.
What is the point of your million practices
if you do not serve Him with love?
Once the fire sages asked Lord Rama,
"Give us the pleasures of Sita. Make us all women."
Now what type of path is this,
in which a man gets a woman's devotion?
This is the reverse of all norms!
When the Gopis heard Shri Krishna's flute,
they ran out of their homes
with their clothes and jewelry in disarray.*



Yet, their devotion was in perfect symmetry,
like letters on a printing press are set in reverse
but appear correct when printed on paper.
When there is recognition of love,
the Vedic rules no longer stand.
Sings Sur, "The Vraj Gopis brought that clever
Enchanter under the rule of their love."

In this poem it is expressed that one should worship Lord Krishna (Who is able to respond to every form of devotion) with the devotional sentiments of the Gopis. It is the Gopis who have the eligibility to serve Krishna in the Vrindavan Lila bower, and that is why Surdas refers to them here. This type of devotion is not acquired through Vedic spiritual practices of any kind. To explain this, Surdas mentions the sixteen thousand 'Agnikumar' Rishis, the sages who became enraptured upon beholding the beautiful form of Lord Rama in the Dandakaranya forest and begged of Him, 'Give us the same loving pleasures that Your wife Sita enjoys.' Lord Rama told them, 'When I appear as Lord Krishna, all of you will manifest as Gopis, and then your desires will be fulfilled.'

Although women are not allowed to perform Vedic rites on their own, in Shri Krishna's Lila, the main eligibility is given to females.* For this reason, Surdas says that the Path of Grace is the reverse of Vedic norms.

The Shrimad Bhagavatam describes how the Gopis, eager to join their Lord Krishna in the Rasa Lila dance, rushed out of their homes with their garments and jewelry backwards. Letters on a printing press are also reversed, but after printing appear properly on the paper. In the world, those Gopis were called crazy, but love is supreme, above all else.

* Here, female does not strictly refer to gender, but rather, to "sribhava," the devotional mood of a loving woman, which can be experienced by a man or a woman.



One who is ignorant of the ways of this world but clever in the Lord's Lila forgets the false world and attains love. In the highest devotional nectars, the rules of the Vedas simply do not apply. When a soul has such pure love, she rules over even the Lord, as the Gopis did. Yet, Lord Krishna bewilders everyone, and is a warrior who can never be defeated! He is a crown-jewel in terms of cleverness, and could never fall under just anyone's sway – only for those who have love. Then He forgets everything else. Such is the way and form of devotion in the Path of Grace, as Surdas has explained in this poem.

Hearing this poem, all the Vaishnavas praised Surdas, saying: "The Lord has showered immense grace upon him." Surdas remained silent.

Next, Shri Gusainji asked him, "Surdasji, where is your mind now?" At that moment, Surdas sang this poem:

Young Radha, I rejoice over You,
for You have chosen to love Krishna.
He is exceedingly ingenious,
and You are the crown jewel of cleverness.
Loving Him, how could You remain apart?
He who adorns Himself in golden garments
is the Master of Your every moment.
Radha, possessed by Krishna's natural charm,
then reaches out and embraces the sky,
thinking it to be Krishna Himself.
When the clever lady beholds
the auspicious form of her own Krishna,
her body bristles with love.
Sur sings, "The wise Radha then talks to her friend.
In the illumination of love, she begins to laugh."



Lastly, Surdas sang,

*Nectar maddened Khanjan-bird eyes,
so lovely and unsteady,
cannot be caged for a moment.
Time and again they fly towards each ear
but return for fear of noose-like earrings.
Now they are held by a line of kohl.
Otherwise, sings Surdas,
they would just fly away.³⁹*

After singing that poem, Surdas fixed his mind on the forms of the divine Couple, Shri Krishna and Shri Swaminiji, cast off his mortal body, and entered into the Lord's Lila. Shri Gusainji returned to Gopalpur. The Vaishnavas gathered together and performed Surdas' last rites and cremation before retuning to Shri Gusainji.

Surdas has four names. Shri Mahaprabhuji called him Sur, which means 'warrior.' In battle, a warrior never takes one step back; he moves ahead and faces every foe. In that way, Surdas' devotion continually progressed day by day.

Shri Gusainji called him 'Surdas.' The attitude of loving service, 'Das bhava,' never diminishes. As Surdas' experiences of the Lord's Lila increased, so did his humility; he never developed egotism or pride.

Surdas' third name is Surajdas. Surdasji composed seven thousand poems in praise of Shri Swaminiji, which reveal many divine moods. Shri Swaminiji Herself then said of Surdas, 'He is Suraj – the sun!' Just as the sun lights the world, so Surdas illuminated Her divine form. Since Shri Swaminiji gave him the name 'Surajdas,' the signature 'Suraj' is found in many of his poems.



The twenty five thousand poems which Shri Nathji composed for Surdas were all signed with the name 'Sur Shyam.' In this way, Surdas' four different names can be found in the signature of his poems.

In his heart and mind, Surdas remained continually absorbed in the Lord's lilas. Therefore, Shri Mahaprabhuji did not give him a personal *svarupa* of Shri Krishna to serve. Surdas experienced the fruitful stage of mental worship of Krishna and thus was always absorbed in the nectars of Lila.

The highest teaching revealed in Surdas' life story is that there is no position equal to humility and no dharma equal to kindness towards others. Surdas undertook such great efforts for the sake of that grocer, arranging for his initiation and upliftment. That is why Shri Mahaprabhu, Shri Gusainji, the Vaishnavas, and everyone else were pleased with Surdas. If anyone came to Surdas with a question, he would lovingly explain the principles of this Path and direct their thoughts toward Krishna.

Out of a billion accomplished devotees, it would be difficult to find one equal to Surdas. Surdas received Shri Mahaprabhuji's total grace. As the story of his life is boundless, we could go on praising him endlessly.



Paramananda Das

Introduction

Like Surdas, Paramananda Das was a teacher with his own following before meeting Shri Vallabhacharya. Both poets composed poems in a variety of devotional moods, and though both were accomplished poets before their initiation from Shri Vallabhacharya, neither had yet understood the entire concept of Krishna's Lila. Whereas Surdas sought out Shri Mahaprabhuji, Lord Krishna Himself went to meet Paramananda Das! Shri Krishna accompanied Shri Vallabhacharya's disciple Kapur to go hear Paramananda Das sing and then blessed the inspired poet. It was a special case of grace which Shri Krishna provided through the medium of His bhakta.

Paramananda Das' works were compiled into a collection called the *Ocean of Paramananda Das*. We see in Paramananda Das consistent inspiration. He sang in all the moods related to Krishna's daily and infinite lilas. Paramananda Das listened carefully to Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya's discourses on *Subodhini*, (a commentary on the Shrimad Bhagavatam) and composed poems in accordance with those teachings. He was an ideal disciple who composed not merely dry repetitions of doctrine, but inspired works containing the essence of devotional mood. His poetry is an expression of his personal experiences with Shri Nathji, and we are fortunate to have his devotional association in these pages. I am amazed with Paramananda Das' Lila sensitivity when I remember his verses,



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*Upon seeing Shri Radha's full moon face,
an ocean of bliss swells in Krishna's body
and overflows into Vraj and Vrindavan.
...By the grace of Nanda's Son,
a bit of this nectar flow can be seen
in those who have contact with Supreme Bliss.*

It is common among the Ashta Chaap and other Indian poets to mention their name at the end of a poem. Sometimes it is merely a signature, but in the case of this and other poems by Paramananda Das, the poet's name refers to his beloved Krishna, the Master of Supreme Bliss – Paramananda. Supremely blissful Krishna was always present in the heart and before the eyes of the bhakta-poet Paramananda Das.



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Paramananda Das

In Krishna's Lila, Paramananda Das' form as Krishna's Ashta Sakha (Gopa friend) is Toka, and his form as a sakhi (Gopi) in the divine Nikunja bower is Chandrabhaga. His door to the Lila is at Surabhi Kund by the Govardhan Hill.

In this world, Paramananda Das was born in Kanoja into a Brahmin family. On the day of his birth, a rich man gave Paramananda Das' father a large sum of money. Very pleased with these events, his father considered, "The Lord has blessed me with a son and this wealth. My child must be very blessed to have brought me such supreme bliss on the day of his birth. I will call him Paramananda Das, the follower of Supreme Bliss."

Later, when it came time to name the child, the astrologer corroborated, "The name that you chose for your son, Paramananda, is also the name indicated in his horoscope." Paramananda Das' father was very pleased by this. He then performed all the prescribed Vedic rites for his son and distributed many gifts. When Paramananda Das became a young boy, his sacred thread ceremony was also celebrated with great pomp.

Paramananda Das was a great bhakta, a vessel of grace, and an intimate lila-associate of Shri Krishna. When Shri Acharyaji Mahaprabhuji appeared on earth to uplift divine souls, through the command of Shri Krishna, his various lila-associates appeared throughout India along with him, just as they did at the time of Shri Krishna's manifestation. The poet Gopaldas has sung in his Vallabhakhyān, "Shri Mahaprabhuji traveled throughout India to shower his grace on divine souls."

Paramananda Das passed a happy childhood in Kanoja, where he grew up and blossomed into a prolific poet. He



composed and sang many poems. He was called 'Swami' and developed his own following, including many other musicians and artists.

Once a drought befell Kanoja, and the ruler's mind turned bitter. He extracted fines from all the towns and confiscated all of Paramananda Das' father's wealth. His distressed parents told their son, "We are now too poor to arrange for your marriage, as all the money we had was just taken. You can earn your own money with your artistic talents. When you have collected enough money, we will find you a wife."

Paramananda Das replied, "I do not wish to marry. What is the use of collecting money? What did you attain with all your wealth, which you have now lost? The reward of wealth is using it to feed the bhaktas and Brahmins. Therefore I do not hoard money. I will daily give you whatever provisions you need to eat, so sit and repeat the Lord's name. You have become penniless so that you can leave your infatuation with money."

Paramananda Das' father replied, "You have become a renunciate from your association, and that is why you think like this. We are householders and need money for our families and other affairs. It brings us respect from our clan." His father then moved to the east but, unable to make a living, proceeded to the south of India. There he made some money and was able to settle. Meanwhile, Paramananda Das surrounded himself with kirtan singers, and his fame spread from town to town. He became extremely talented in the art of singing.

1.

Paramananda Das meets Shri Mahaprabhuji

Once, Paramananda Das went to Prayag for the Maha Makar festival. He sang every day, and many people came to listen. At that time, Shri Mahaprabhuji was residing across the river in Adel. Some people from Adel happened



to hear Paramananda Das sing in the nearby village and reported to Shri Mahaprabhuji, "One Paramananda Swami from Kanoja has come. He is a great kirtan singer!"

Shri Mahaprabhuji replied, "Paramananda Das is a divine soul, so it is only natural that he has such talent."

Shri Mahaprabhuji had a disciple named Kapur Kshatri, whose service was to carry water. Kapur loved music, and so when he heard about the great singer, he thought, 'I will go listen to this Paramananda Swami without telling Shri Mahaprabhuji. If he knew, Shri Mahaprabhuji would be angry and ask, 'Why are you leaving your seva?' and then I will not be able to go." Kapur had a great desire to hear Paramananda Swami sing.

Kapur has a previous lila connection with Paramananda Das. In the Lila, Kapur is the Gopi Sonajuhi, an associate of Chandrabhaga, Paramananda Das' lila form. Kapur was born in Sudamapuri in the home of a rich and extremely worldly Kshatri man, who slept around with many women and spent his money in worldly pursuits. One day, the king looted all of his wealth and threw Kapur and his mother and father into prison. His father bribed one of the jailers and they managed to escape. After two or three days on the run, while they were passing through a forest, a lion killed the mother and father. Kapur, who was only fourteen, sat alone in the forest, crying, hungry, and thirsty, unable to even walk. To his great fortune, Shri Mahaprabhuji was on pilgrimage around India and happened to pass through this forest, called Gehevarvan. Seeing the boy, Shri Mahaprabhuji called to him, "Who are you? Why are you sitting alone in the forest crying?"

Kapur bowed to Shri Mahaprabhuji and explained his plight. Shri Mahaprabhuji told Krishnadas Meghan, "If there is some mahaprasad, feed it to this boy, and quickly give him water so that his life may be saved."



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Krishnadas then bathed, fed and gave water to the boy. Once Kapur's mind had settled, he prayed to Shri Mahaprabhuji, "Maharaj! Keep me with you. I will remain in your service for the rest of my life. Now you are mother, father, and Lord to me."

The next day Shri Mahaprabhuji initiated Kapur with both Nam Nivedan and Brahma Sambandh mantras* and gave him the service of carrying water. After a few days, Shri Mahaprabhuji returned to Adel, where Kapur was very pleased to have the darshan of Shri Mahaprabhuji's Child Krishna, Shri Navanita Priyaji.

Kapur became immediately attached to Navanita Priyaji's form and thought to himself, "I was an orphan; though his grace, Shri Acharya Mahaprabhuji accepted me and took me with him. Now he has given me the direct experience of Shri Navanita Priyaji, the darling Child Krishna of mother Yashoda. If I am given the chance to do seva for Shri Navanita Priyaji, I will always serve Him and have His darshan."

Shri Mahaprabhuji, being the very form of the Lord, knew of Kapur's wish. He called him over and said, "It is your great fortune that the desire to serve Child Krishna has arisen in your heart. Now you may carry Shri Navanita Priyaji's water."

Kapur was very pleased and prayed to Shri Mahaprabhuji, "Maharaj! That was exactly my heart's desire, which you have fulfilled through your total kindness." From that day, Kapur, full of the greatest love, happily collected bathing and sweet water for use in Shri Navanita Priyaji's seva. After some days, Shri Navanita Priyaji began to personally appear and respond directly to Kapur's devotional mood. When Paramananda Swami came to Prayag, at first Kapur was not

* The first and second initiations into the Pushti Marg

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able to go hear him sing, because he didn't have any free time from his seva.

about Paramananda Swami, the bhakta replied, "Paramananda Swami sings every night for a few hours. Today, because it is the auspicious eleventh lunar day, he will sing all night long."

Kapur happily thought to himself, "Tonight is my chance to hear Paramananda Swami sing! I will leave after Shri Mahaprabhuji goes to sleep." That evening, after he had completed his daily water seva and listened to Shri Mahaprabhuji give teachings, Kapur left Adel for Prayag. He realized, "At this hour I will not find a boat to cross the river, so I will have to swim." He was an able swimmer, and it was the warm season, so wearing only an undergarment and placing his dhoti and shawl on his head, Kapur swam across the river and made his way to Paramananda Swami's kirtan. Having never met Paramananda Swami personally, Kapur sat at a distance, but then some disciples of Shri Mahaprabhuji from Prayag called Kapur to sit closer to the performers. First some other musicians sang, and then Paramananda Swami began to sing songs in the mood of separation from the Lord.

Paramananda Das was separated from the Lila and at this point had not seen Shri Mahaprabhuji or Shri Nathji. Only after having their darshan would he regain conscious knowledge of Shri Krishna's Lila. According to Shri Acharyaji's Path of Grace, it is only after having the association of other great bhaktas that Shri Krishna bestows His grace. Hence Shri Mahaprabhuji sent his vessel of grace, Kapur the water carrier, to Paramananda Swami in order to grace him. Shri Krishna never left Kapur for



even a moment; He always remained with him. Surdas has sung about such bhaktas, "The merciful Lord chases after those bhaktas who are afflicted with His separation."

In the story of Jagannath Joshi it is explained that Shri Krishna came from behind and held back the hand of a warrior who was trying to kill the bhakta, Jagannath Joshi. In the Shrimad Bhagavatam there are many incidents which relate how Shri Thakurji chases after His intimate Vaishnava devotees. Up to this point, Paramananda Das was in separation from the Lord, so he daily sang songs of separation. He then sang,

Afflicted with Krishna's separation,
the people of Vraj ponder:
"Without Gopal, we stand swindled,
our bodies weak and wasted.
From morning to night,
Mother Yashoda stares down the road.
If anyone mentions her Krishna's name,
tears flow from her eyes.
This town of Mathura is like a line of kohl –
whoever passes through it turns black."
Sings Paramananda Swami,¹
"To be without Krishna
is like the moon without the stars."

The poet continued,

(The Gopis explain to the yogi Uddhava:)
"In Gokul, everyone worships Gopal.
O, Uddhava. Those who depend on practices
go and live in Benares, the abode of Shiva.
Even if Krishna has left us Lordless,
why should we leave
and break the bonds of our love?"



We will not lose our cool,
even if the moon is seized by Rahu.²
What sin have we committed
that caused Krishna to send you here
with instructions on yoga,
and ignore our loving service?
Whoever has felt separation from Paramananda,
Supreme Bliss, would never forsake
His opulent nature and beg for liberation."

Paramananda Swami then sang,

"In what impassioned soul can I confide?
Listen, my friend:
Without the son of Nanda, what can I say?
The pain in this body is beyond words.
Where are the enchanting banks of the Yamuna River?
Where are her flowing waters?
Where is that trysting place
strewn with forest flowers and soft leaves?
Where is the sight and touch of that blissful One,
Paramananda, with His lotus eyes
and delicate form?"

Paramananda Swami then sang another poem:

O, friend! I want to meet Krishna, the Son of Nanda.
Since I saw His eyes, He has stolen my heart away.
I cannot sleep. The length of the night is beyond measure.
I anxiously await the coming morn.
Listen, friend – now how can I live
when I hear the rooster's call?
One who has pure love in the heart
begs nothing else from anyone.



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*Sings Paramananda, "Listen, sakhi –
you will meet Krishna.
Now stop tormenting yourself!"*

For the entire night, Paramananda Das sang songs that expressed his mood of separation. An hour and a half before sunrise, he stopped singing, and everyone returned to their homes. Kapur greeted Paramananda Das with "Jai Shri Krishna" and then returned to Adel very pleased, thinking, "Paramananda Swami is as talented a singer as everyone says he is!" Remembering Paramananda Swami's fine kirtan, Kapur swam across the river just as he had come. On the other side he bathed and returned to Shri Mahaprabhuji, who had just awakened. He bowed to his guru and began his water seva.

It was for the purpose of gracing Paramananda Swami that Kapur went to hear him sing. Why else would an accomplished soul with direct experience of Shri Thakurji go to visit someone else? Grace was imminent for Paramananda Swami, and that is why Lord Krishna, as Shri Navanita Priyaji, inspired Kapur to go and even went with him! Shri Navanita Priyaji sat in Kapur's lap listening to Paramananda Swami's kirtan.

Meanwhile, tired from the all-night kirtan, Paramananda Swami went to sleep.

Here, one could question why Paramananda Swami went to sleep just before sunrise, thereby squandering the karmic fruit of remaining awake the entire night on a fast day. Paramananda Swami was very knowledgeable and clever, so he would not have fallen asleep carelessly. The answer is that Paramananda Das is a divine soul with connection to the Lila. He desired only

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Shri Thakurji, not some reward for austerity. Therefore he used the eleventh day fast as an excuse to sing more of Shri Krishna's names. The fruit of a vigil can be lost by falling asleep early, but singing the Lord's name is always fruitful, regardless of time. If Paramananda Das had not gone to sleep when he did, his body would have been lethargic the next day, and then how could he sing again later that night? Therefore Paramananda Das went to sleep, forsaking dependence on spiritual means and taking the shelter of the Lord's names instead.

While Paramananda Das slept, in a dream he saw Kapur at the previous night's singing performance. Shri Navanita Priyaji was sitting in Kapur's lap, listening to the kirtan! Shri Navanita Priyaji laughed and said to Paramananda Swami, "Today, after so many days, I have finally heard your singing. Kapur, Shri Mahaprabhuji's blessed disciple, came to hear you, and I accompanied him."

Another doubt arises from the above account. The Lord hears everything and resides in all places, so why did He say that He was hearing Paramananda Das for the first time? The reason is that Paramananda Das' acceptance was delayed, so the Lord listened to his kirtan only in His form as the inner witness within the poet's heart. Now that Paramananda Das was to be accepted by Shri Mahaprabhuji, the Lord personally appeared and explained to Paramananda Das the nature of His grace: "By coming to hear your kirtan tonight, I have fully blessed you with My grace. Now you will quickly find Me."

When Paramananda Das awoke, the beauty of Shri Navanita Priyaji's form, lovely as a million love gods, shimmered in his eyes. Knowledge filled his heart, and he became anxious to see Lord Krishna again. He felt affliction as he considered, "When will I have Shri Navanita Priyaji's



darshan again? All these days and nights I have sung the Lord's glories, but I have never had such a sight before. I was only able to behold Shri Krishna because Kapur came, so I will go and meet him. Then everything will be perfected."

Paramananda Das immediately arose and set out for Adel. By the time he arrived at the banks of the Yamuna River, it was early morning. He took the first boat across to Adel, where he saw Shri Mahaprabhuji performing his morning sandhya prayers. At that moment, the poet had a vision of Shri Acharyaji as the remarkable divine form of Shri Krishna Himself. It was as Shri Gusainji explained in *Vallabhashtak*, that Shri Mahaprabhuji "actually is none other than Shri Krishna."

Paramananda Swami was astonished by the vision and became speechless. He thought to himself, "It is not surprising that Shri Krishna sat in Kapur's lap and listened to my kirtan, when he has such a praiseworthy guru as Shri Mahaprabhuji. I will also become Shri Mahaprabhuji's disciple, but I don't feel that it is in my power to request him to accept me. First I will go to Kapur and tell him of my desire."

Just then, Shri Mahaprabhu called out, "Paramananda Das, sing something about Shri Krishna's Lila!" Paramananda Das fully prostrated himself before Shri Mahaprabhuji and then sang the following songs of separation:

*She repeatedly asks the Vraj maidens,
"How long has it been since Gopal left?"*

I have been away at my parent's home."

(A friend turns to her and says...)

"Friend, where has your beauty gone?"

Look, your lotus face has withered."



"All of my fortune has gone with Krishna.

Now my frail heart burns with His separation."

One Gopi mumbles something.

Another stares, lifeless.

A third replies, bewildered:

"Akrura stole everything away

when he took Krishna to Mathura!"³

He is the wealth of Paramananda Swami's life.

Then Paramananda Das sang,

My heart's desire remains.

I never saw Him again –

that Lord of cowlads and bower Lover.

*O, friend! One day I was walking on this path,
going to sell my curds, when Krishna grabbed me.*

*His pretense was to demand a dairy tax,
but His motive was purely love.*

Now, without His sight, every second seems an age.

The flames of separation scorch me.

*Devoid of Krishna, the eyes of Paramananda Swami
have become flowing rivers.*

He then sang,

It is His lotus-petal eyes!

*O, friend! I am reminded again and again
how He sent secret love signals from afar.*

That Lila, that autumn Rasa Lila dance –

Krishna covered with the dust of His cows!

*His enchanting call, as if to the cows,
but really to invite me...*

These memories are arrows in my heart.

How to endure the pain?



Krishna's Inner Circle

*What can Paramananda Das say?
My heart is entwined in Him.*

Paramananda Das continued,

*I can't forget those lotus-petal eyes!
Now I shed constant tears.
I am so eager to be relieved by the love of Vrindavan.
His close embrace amongst the vines in the
Vrindavan bowers...*

*How can I erase these scenes from my mind?
Resting in His arms, playing His Rasa dance in a glade
where worthless Cupid is banned.⁴
How can those who have been nourished
by the sweet words of Paramananda Das' Krishna
live without Him?*

After Paramananda Das sang these songs of separation before Shri Mahaprabhuji, the master called out to him, "Now sing something about Krishna's childhood Lila."

With folded hands, Paramananda Das replied, "Maharaj, I don't understand anything about Lord Krishna's childhood lilas."

Shri Mahaprabhuji then told him, "After you bathe in the Yamuna River I will explain it to you."

Paramananda Das then asked, "Where is your disciple, Kapur?"

"He must be doing his seva of gathering water," Shri Acharyaji answered.

Paramananda Das then proceeded to the Yamuna River to bathe. As it was time to begin the seva, Shri Mahaprabhuji quickly went to the temple and awoke Shri Navanita Priyaji.

Paramananda Das



Meanwhile, Kapur arrived at the Yamuna River with a water jug. When Paramananda Das saw Kapur, he approached him full of bliss and with folded hands, greeted him, "Jai Shri Krishna! Last night when you graced us with your presence at the all-night kirtan, Lord Krishna sat in your lap and listened. That night Shri Navanita Priyaji came to me in my dream and said, 'Today, I listened to your kirtan.' In this way you showered immense grace upon me, and that is why I have come to see you. Now please tell me how I can become Shri Mahaprabhuji's disciple and have Shri Krishna's darshan every day. Through his grace, Shri Acharyaji gave me darshan of the form of Shri Krishna, and it is all due to the power of your good association!"

Kapur explained, "Shri Mahaprabhu has showered his grace upon you. That is why you had the vision of Shri Krishna. Now Shri Mahaprabhuji has consented to initiate you, so quickly bathe and return to him. By taking his shelter, all of your heart's desires will be fulfilled. By the way, please don't tell him I visited you last night. He could become angry and ask, 'Why did you leave your Krishna seva and go there?'"

Paramananda Das then bathed in the Yamuna River and followed Kapur, with his jug of Yamuna water, to the temple. At that time, Shri Mahaprabhuji had just finished Shri Navanita Priyaji's ornamentation and had placed the Gopivallabh Bhog food offering before Him. When Paramananda Das arrived, Shri Mahaprabhuji told the poet, "Sit over here."

Paramananda Das fully prostrated to Shri Mahaprabhuji and then sat down. After Shri Mahaprabhuji took away the food offering, he brought Paramananda Das before Shri Navanita Priyaji and initiated him with both Nam Nivedan and Brahma Sambandh mantras. Afterwards, Shri Acharyaji explained



to Paramananda Das the divine contents of the tenth canto of the Shrimad Bhagavatam.

When Shri Acharyaji first asked Paramananda Das to "sing something about Shri Krishna's lilas," Paramananda Das sang poems of separation. Then Shri Mahaprabhuji said, "Sing songs about the Lord's childhood lilas." The reason for this is the following: Shri Krishna's childhood poems are songs of union about the lilas that take place in the home of Nandarayaji, Krishna's father. If union is truly experienced one time, afterwards, the mood of separation becomes fruitful (after experiencing the mood of union, the fruit of separation is achieved). That is why in the Rasa Lila chapters of the Shrimad Bhagavatam, Shri Krishna first called the Gopis to Him and danced with them, giving them the experience of union. Then He suddenly disappeared, which allowed them to receive the fruit of separation. Thus the Lord has said, "One who has found a fortune and then lost it thinks a lot about that fortune."

Shri Mahaprabhuji asked Paramananda Das to sing of Shri Krishna's child lilas so that through the experience of union, he could quickly come to understand the real nature of divine separation. When Paramananda Das replied, "Maharaj! I don't understand Shri Krishna's childhood lilas," he revealed that he had not yet experienced the nectar-mood of union. He had forgotten his true Lila-source, but because he was a divine soul separated from that Lila, from birth Paramananda Das sang songs of separation. After being initiated, any obstructive ignorance within him was dispelled. Then, as Shri Mahaprabhuji explained the tenth canto of the Shrimad Bhagavatam, Paramananda Das gained direct experience of Shri Krishna's form as Shri Navanita Priyaji, and all of the lilas described in the sacred Bhagavat text arose clearly in his heart.

In his Sarvottama Stotra treatise, Shri Gusainji described his father, Shri Mahaprabhuji as, "The one who has churned



the nectar ocean of the Shrimad Bhagavatam." So Shri Gusainji calls the Shrimad Bhagavatam an ocean of nectar, and Shri Mahaprabhuji established that in Paramananda Das' heart by describing its contents to him. Similarly, Shri Mahaprabhuji had earlier established the nectar ocean form of the Shrimad Bhagavatam in the heart of Surdas, by teaching the blind poet its contents. That is why of all Shri Mahaprabhuji's grace-filled disciples, only Paramananda Das and Surdas are called 'oceans.' Their songs, like the oceans, have no limits. So Shri Acharyaji gave Paramananda Das the sacred command to "sing about Shri Krishna's child lilas," and then Paramananda Das was able to experience the nectar of union.

Then Paramananda Das sang poems of Shri Krishna's childhood lilas before Shri Mahaprabhuji. First he sang,

O, friend! The beautiful lotus-eyed Shyam
is rocking in a cradle.
All the Gokul Gopis are singing of His childhood lilas.
Krishna's jewel-like toenails and crimson,
tender young lotus feet are luminous as the moon.
His curly locks are like lines of black bees.
A necklace of large pearls hangs from His neck.
Krishna grabs His toe with His lotus hand
and puts it in His mouth.
Seeing His reflection, He laughs again and again.
Queen Yashoda gazes upon her heap of fortune,
Krishna, her darling Son.⁵
Paramananda Swami nourishes love for young Gopal.

Then he sang,

"Yashoda, your fortune is beyond description.
The form which Brahma and the other gods
have difficulty finding has come to you!



Krishna's Inner Circle

*Shiva, Narada, Sanaka and great sages perform
various practices in order to meet Him,
but look!*

*He has become Nanda's Son, covered with dust, and
wraps His arms around your neck."*

*Yashoda beholds Krishna's smiling face
as He rests in the jeweled cradle.*

She coos, "Swing gently, my dear child.

I offer my life to you."

Paramananda Das offers himself as well.

Paramananda Das then sang another poem:

*In Nanda's jewel-laden courtyard, two brothers play.
They have become a pair, one fair and one dark,*

Baladeva and Kunvara Kanhaiya.

*Golden bells on their anklets chime,
enticing the beautiful women of Vraj.⁶*

*The scene makes even the love god shy.
Their attentive mothers, Yashoda and Rohini,
stand by while their small lads dance
to the snapping of their fingers.*

*I am enthralled, seeing them adorned
in their blue and yellow shawls.*

*Paramananda Das sings, filled with bliss,
over the amusement of these divine Boys.*

Finally, he sang,

*The women of Vraj sing the praises of their beloved Hari.
Krishna blissfully crawls around*

Nanda's jewel-studded courtyard.

*My Chagan Magan⁷ slips and falls,
then lifts Himself up onto His hands and knees.*

Paramananda Das



*Mother Yashoda then takes her dust-covered son,
her vessel of love, into her lap.*

*Krishna, Who was not in the least bit fatigued
while measuring the worlds with three footsteps,⁸
now has difficulty crossing the doorsill.*

*Paramananda Das' Krishna,
adorned with a lovely tiger's claw pendant,⁹
is fond of His devotees.*

Paramananda Das sang many such songs about Krishna's childhood lilas, which Shri Mahaprabhuji was very pleased to hear. Later Paramananda Das lived with Shri Mahaprabhuji at his home in Adel at the confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna Rivers. There, Shri Mahaprabhuji told Paramananda Das, "Sing poems throughout the day for my Child Krishna, Shri Navanita Priyaji. This will be your seva."

Paramananda Das wrote new poems daily and sang them to Shri Navanita Priyaji from dawn to dusk. During the times he was not singing in the temple, Paramananda Das would go before Shri Mahaprabhuji and sing about Shri Krishna's Vraj lilas. Shri Mahaprabhuji would give teachings from Shri Subodhini. Paramananda Das would then compose poems about what Shri Mahaprabhuji had explained and sing them to him.

2.

Paramananda Das goes to Vraj

One day, Paramananda Das heard Shri Mahaprabhuji speak about the greatness of the Lord's lotus feet. He then composed a poem about them and sang it for Shri Mahaprabhuji:



I bow at the lotus feet of the Lord of the world,
 who runs with herds of cows.
 Those lotus feet are covered with dust,
 and the Gopis embrace them in their hearts –
 those lotus feet which Yudhishtar¹⁰ worshipped
 and the sun god follows.
 Those lotus feet have been seen in India
 by Pitamaha and Bhishma.
 Those lotus feet which Shiva and the great seers
 place within their lotus-like hearts
 are the ornament of Shri Lakshmi's heart.
 They are extolled by the Vedas
 and the great sages of the Shrimad Bhagavatam.
 Those lotus feet, which purify the world,
 were placed upon Bali Raja's back.
 This servant of supreme bliss sings of those lotus feet,
 saturated with the elixir of His love.¹¹

Afterwards, Paramananda Das composed the following
 prayer to Shri Mahaprabhuji:

O beloved of the Gopis,
 I request these things of you:
 To have human birth and Shri Krishna's seva.
 I would also appreciate residence in Vraj.
 Let me be a follower of Shri Vallabh and his lineage.
 May I be called a servant of the Vaishnavas.
 Allow me to bathe daily in the waters of the Yamuna and
 glorify Krishna with my mind, speech and action.
 Let me daily listen to the Shrimad Bhagavatam,
 and let not my mind wander anywhere else.
 Paramananda Das requests to behold You always
 and never be blind to You.¹²



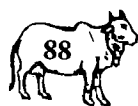
After hearing Paramananda Das sing this poem, Shri Mahaprabhuji understood that, "In this poem, Paramananda Das has expressed his wish to have the vision of Vraj, so now I will give him that darshan." Shri Mahaprabhuji then arranged for a pilgrimage to Vraj and set out from Adel, accompanied by Paramananda Das, Krishnadas Meghan, Damodardas, Yadavendradas, and other Vaishnavas.

Along the way, they passed through Paramananda Das' town of Kanoja, where Paramananda Das requested Shri Mahaprabhuji to visit his home. Seeing this chance as a great blessing, Paramananda Das lovingly bought all the necessary food provisions for the Vaishnavas to offer Shri Krishna in their seva and humbly offered those goods to Shri Mahaprabhuji and his disciples.

After preparing and offering various food preparations to Shri Krishna, Shri Mahaprabhuji took His meals. Afterwards Paramananda Das fed the Vaishnavas mahaprasad and arranged comfortable seats and pillows for them to sit on before taking mahaprasad himself. Paramananda Das then bowed and sat before Shri Mahaprabhuji. His guru then gave him the divine request, "Paramananda Das, sing something of the glory of Bhagavan!"

Paramananda Das considered, "Shri Mahaprabhuji's mind is now absorbed in Shri Krishna and His Vraj lila. Therefore, I will sing a poem of separation, in which every moment seems to last an age." He then sang,

"O Krishna, I remember Your Lila.
 My mind and heart create images of the lotus-eyed One,
 the Enticer of my heart.
 "How can I forget how kind He was
 the one time I met Him?"



Krishna's Inner Circle

*I love His laugh, His sidelong glances,
His alluring gait."
Sometimes, in the darkness of the night,
that Gopi deeply embraces a Kadamba tree.
At other times she sings like a cuckoo.
Then, confused, she calls out repeatedly,
"Where are you? Where are you?"
and starts running as if with Krishna.
Sometimes she closes her eyes
and adorns her Beloved Krishna
with a garland from her heart.
"By meditating on Shyam, the Lord of Supreme Bliss,"
sings Paramananda Das,
"the separation somehow passes."*

As soon as Paramananda Das sang, "O Krishna, I remember Your Lila," Shri Mahaprabhuji became so engrossed in Krishna's divine pastimes that he fell totally unconscious.

Shri Gusainji has described his father, Shri Mahaprabhuji as "The moon of Vrindavan, who has manifested the highest bliss of Shri Krishna's intimate Lila. He is an ocean swelling with the nectar of the Rasa dance and other lilas." Shri Gusainji also described Shri Mahaprabhuji in his Sarvottama Stotra as, "Totally attached to the Rasa Lila." The essence of everything Shri Mahaprabhuji has written is Shri Krishna's Rasa Lila dance with the Gopis. He is totally absorbed into that Lila and nothing else.

Shri Mahaprabhuji remained unconscious in a devotional trance for three days, completely unaware of the physical world. He remained seated, eyes closed, on a bed with pillows. Damodardas and other Vaishnavas who

Paramananda Das



understood Shri Mahaprabhuji knew what was happening. They all quietly sat and watched him.

How was this possible? Shri Mahaprabhuji is Shri Krishna Himself, so he could not have been obstructed by the limitations of a physical body. He assumed a human form and outwardly exhibited all of the actions of a human body, but the needs and ways of the human body were not an obstruction for him. Therefore all of Shri Mahaprabhuji's followers sat and waited for three days.

On the fourth day, Shri Mahaprabhuji regained consciousness and opened his eyes, and all the Vaishnavas rejoiced.

Shri Mahaprabhuji remained unconscious for three days because the Rasa Lila dance is performed in three main places: the Govardhan Hill (Shri Giriraj), Shri Vrindavan, and Shri Yamunaji. On the Govardhan Hill, all the things needed for the Lila are prepared. In Vrindavan, bliss filled Krishna plays in the kunja forest bowers. Shri Yamunaji is the source of the Rasa Lila. In this way, Shri Krishna plays both on land and in the water. For one day, Shri Mahaprabhuji experienced Krishna's many loving lilas on the Govardhan Hill, as Chaturbhujadas has sung, "Krishna and His consort have spent the night in loving plays in a cave in the Govardhan Hill."

On the second day, Shri Mahaprabhuji experienced the bower lilas of Vrindavan, and on the third day he saw the Lord's water dalliance and other plays by the Yamuna River. On the fourth day he came back to this earth, in order to teach devotion, bring many souls to the shelter of the Lord, and to give them the experience of the nectar of Krishna's lilas.



Paramananda Das was troubled and thought, "I will never sing a poem like that again in front of Shri Mahaprabhuji."

Paramananda Das was worried that if Shri Mahaprabhuji became too absorbed in the Lila, he might not return. Then, how could all the divine souls who had taken birth here on earth be uplifted? Therefore he decided, "I will not sing songs of separation in front of Shri Acharyaji again." Shri Mahaprabhuji's actual form is of separation. As Shri Gusainji has described in Sarvottama Stotra, "For the experience of the Lord's divine separation, He taught us to renounce everything unrelated." When everything worldly and Vedic is forgotten, it can be understood that one has experienced the mood of separation.

Then Paramananda Das sang a poem of remembrance:

*Friend, I sing of auspicious bliss!
Krishna is the wish fulfilling jewel of Gokul.
Whatever you ask for is received.
Since that lotus-eyed One came to Vraj,
everyone's prosperity has flourished.
Just look! The eight supernatural powers
stand by Nanda's door.
The wish-fulfilling cow always lives
in the forever flowering Vrindavan.
There, you only need to ask
and the clouds will shower rains.
We live through Krishna's grace.
Yashoda explains Hari's greatness to the Gopis,
while Paramananda Das relishes His enticing flute.¹³*



After Shri Mahaprabhuji had taken his meals and gone for rest, all the Vaishnavas enjoyed mahaprasad, and lastly Paramananda Das also took his meals. After Shri Acharyaji awoke in the afternoon, Paramananda Das sang another poem before him:

*I sing of the pure glories of Vrindavan's Moon!¹⁴
The luster of the sun and moon
could never compare to my Govinda.
Mother Yashoda boasts of the splendor
of her mass of bliss
while Paramananda Das' Lord
plays and wanders with His cowlads.*

Then Paramananda Das sang,

*My friend, let's go and live in Krishna's
town of Nandagam!
There we will laugh and play in the cowpen with
the Moon of Vraj, Shri Krishna.
Now we live in the town of Baten, content except
for the pain of living far away from Him.¹⁵
Still, we watch from a distance
as Krishna steals the butter.
See, my dear friend, how fruitful life can be.
My eyes are like the fish,
thirsting every moment for His sight.
Sings Paramananda Das, "This is a difficult love."*

After hearing that poem, Shri Mahaprabhuji announced, "Let us proceed to Vraj." Afterwards, Paramananda Das brought all of his former disciples to Shri Mahaprabhuji and requested, "Accept these souls."



Shri Mahaprabhuji questioned, "You have initiated them and made them your followers. Why do you want them to become mine?"

Paramananda Das explained, "Maharaj! Before, I thought I was a *swami*, a spiritual master, and made many followers. Now, I am your *das*: your servant. The position of being a *swami*, a spiritual leader, is only suited to one who is a *swami*. One who is a *das* and wants to become a *swami* is a fool. I made disciples out of my ignorance. Now accept and liberate them."¹⁶

Shri Mahaprabhuji initiated all of Paramananda Das' former followers and then left Kanoja with all the Vaishnavas, proceeding towards Vraj. After several days, they arrived in Gokul. Shri Acharyaji bathed at Govinda Ghat and then sat at his *baithak* under a Chonkar tree. Nearby is another *baithak* near the Shri Dwarkanathji temple where Shri Acharyaji took his rest for the night. Whenever he came to Gokul, he stayed in that *baithak*. It was also the place where Shri Mahaprabhuji celebrated Shri Krishna's appearance day, rocking Shri Navanita Priyaji in a cradle and celebrating by throwing curd all around the temple. This *baithak* is referred to in the story of Mahaprabhuji's disciple, the bhakta Gajjanadhavan Kshatri.

There by the banks of the Yamuna River, as Shri Mahaprabhuji taught Paramananda Das his *Yamunashtakam*, a Sanskrit prayer in praise of Shri Yamunaji, the form of Shri Yamunaji arose clearly within Paramananda Das' heart.

The Yamunashtakam

I joyfully bow to Shri Yamunaji, the Giver of all divine powers. Her expansive sands shine brightly like the lotus feet of



Lord Krishna. Flowers from fresh forests along Shri Yamunaji's banks mingle with Her and make Her waters fragrant. Both humble and assertive Gopis worship Shri Yamunaji well. She contains the beauty of Shri Krishna. (1)

Shri Yamunaji emerges from the heart of Lord Narayana and cascades from the summit of the Kalindi Mountain with brilliance. She appears to be swaying in a lovely swing as She descends the rocky slopes, Her waters roaring and filled with dalliance. Glories to Shri Yamunaji, Daughter of the sun, who increases the bhaktas' love for Mukunda.¹⁷ (2)

Shri Yamunaji has come to earth for its purification. Like the Gopis serve their beloved Krishna, Shri Yamunaji is served by the many songs of the peacocks, parrots, swans and other birds. Her waves are Her arms, and Her sands are Her pearly bangles. Her banks are Her hips. Bow to this beautiful Yamuna, the fourth and foremost beloved of Krishna.¹⁸ (3)

Embellished with countless virtues, Shri Yamunaji is praised by Shiva, Brahma and other divinities. Her hue is always the color of dark clouds. She fulfilled the wishes of Dhruva and Parasha. At Her banks by the pure city of Mathura, She is surrounded by the Gopis and Gopas. Oh Yamunaji, You have taken the shelter of Shri Krishna, the Ocean of grace. Bring joy to my heart. (4)

Only after Ganga merged with You, O Yamunaji, did She become beloved to Krishna, and only then was Ganga able to give all devotional powers to those who worship Her. If there is anyone who can come close to You, it would be Your co-wife, Shri Lakshmi. May You remain forever in my heart, Kalindi, Beloved of Hari, Destroyer of the strife of this age of Kali. (5)

Obeisances to You forever, Shri Yamunaji. Your story is most amazing. Those who sip Your waters are never tormented by Yama, the God of retribution, for how could He ever harm the children of His younger sister, even if they are bad? Those who worship You become beloved to Hari, just like the Gopis. (6)



By being near You, may my body be divinely transformed and renewed. Then it will not be difficult at all to love Krishna. This is why I cherish You. Ganga was praised in the world only after She joined You, and grace-filled souls only worship Ganga after She has met You. (7)

Who is capable of praising You, Krishna's beloved Shri Yamunaji, co-wife of Lakshmi? If worshipped in conjunction with Hari, Shri Lakshmi can at best award the bliss of liberation.¹⁹ Your story, however, is far greater, for Your entire body is comprised of the beads of sweat that have fallen from Shri Krishna during His love-plays with the Gopis. (8)

Oh Yamuna, Daughter of the sun! Those who joyfully recite this eight-fold praise have all of their impurities removed and love Krishna, the Giver of liberation. Through You, all devotional powers are attained and Shri Krishna becomes pleased. You transform the nature of Your bhaktas, says Shri Vallabhacharya, Beloved of Hari.²⁰ (9)

After hearing the Yamunashtakam, Shri Yamunaji's divine form enlightened Paramananda Das' heart, and he began to sing her glories. He sang,

Shri Yamunaji, may I receive this grace:
To remain close to You every day,
singing the glories of Rama and Krishna.
Let Your sanctifying waters cleanse me,
purify my thoughts, and remove strife.
Through Your grace, Daughter of the sun,
may my love for Krishna's feet increase.
I pray to You and request
that I forget all ignoble association.
Sings Paramananda Das,
"Yamunaji, You give the four fruits –
dharma, wealth, enjoyment and devotional liberation.
Allow me to love Krishna."



Then he sang,

Shri Yamunaji, know me to be humble.
Give me the chance to ask Nandā's Son
to make me the servant of the Gopis.
You are supremely generous, a treasure chest of grace:
You award joy to those who take shelter at Your feet.
The dancing, turning Mountain Holder
is always under Your control.
The Gopis all play with Shri Krishna,
dancing the amazing Rasa Lila by Your banks,
where pleasure-filled forest bowers
brim with lotuses and flowers.
Soaked with perspiration from their plays,
those beautiful women of Vraj bathe in Your waters,
where Krishna delights them with water games.
Again and again, He splashes water on those maidens,
who are like stars around the moon.
O Yamunaji, I daily bow at Your feet.
I will always do any task You ask of me.
Sings Paramananda Das, "I remain Your handmaiden.
Grant me the joy of worshipping Your lotus feet."

Paramananda Das continued with this poem:

O Yamunaji, Daughter of the sun, Sister of Yama,
stunning goddess, wife of Govinda –
You remove the evils of this age of struggle.
O Yamunaji! Glories to You, beloved of Shri Krishna.
You cleanse sinners and allow them to cross
this worldly existence.
O Yamunaji, You give fearlessness
to those who take Your shelter.
A mother like You could never neglect
the welfare of her children.



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*O nectar-filled Yamunaji, You are cool,
gentle, and fragrant.
You have descended to earth
and now appear as a river.
Sings Paramananda Das, "You are the greatest purifier,
present in every age, the internal Witness,
and the Vedas continually praise You."*

Shri Mahaprabhuji was pleased to hear Paramananda Das' praises of Shri Yamunaji there at Her river banks and then gave him the direct vision of Shri Krishna's divine childhood lilas in Gokul. Paramananda Das beheld an amazing darshan of Gopis filling their pots with water from Yamuna, and Shri Thakurji giving them pleasure through many kinds of plays. He then sang the following poem:²¹

*On her way to the Yamuna to gather water,
the Gopi Shri Chandravali came upon that Dark Cloud,
Krishna, playing in the path.
Their eyes met...
Her mind stuck to Him.
As His enchanting form overcame her heart,
she was unable to move a single step.
From that first encounter, love arose in her heart.
Sings Paramananda Das, "Meeting Supreme Bliss,
she was like an ant who gets stuck in molasses."*

Then he sang,

*"Krishna, take hold of my arm.
I can't get down these steps to the river
to draw my water. I fear I'll slip without You."
Seeing the form of the beautiful, dark Cowlad
and His lotus-petal eyes, she became ensnared.*

Paramananda Das



*As loving desires surged within her heart,
Krishna recognized her.
Laughing, He took her hand and supported her
such that her jug would not fall.
Sings Paramananda Das, "That clever Gopi enjoys
the touch of the lotus-eyed one."²²*

After that, Paramananda Das sang many other poems about Shri Krishna's childhood lilas, through which he came to understand the divine form of Gokul. First he sang,

*The Gopis sing with melodious voices
the glories of the Lord of the three worlds,
Who resides in the home of
Nanda Raja and Yashoda Rani.
The Vedas, the goddess Sarasvati,
Narada and other sages,
Brahma and the thousand headed Shesha
also sing of Him - the Hero of the world.
Now Paramananda Das sings,
his mind, action, and speech
filled with love for His lotus feet.*

Then he sang the following poem:

*The Gopis come to Queen Yashoda's house
and gaze upon Shri Krishna's lotus face
to dispel the anguish of separation
they have felt all day.
The Gopis giggle among themselves
as Krishna tries to climb over the doorsill.
Yashoda waves salt and mustard seeds
around her child²³
and offers Him her mind, body, and wealth.*



Yashoda picks up her Krishna,
caressing and holding Him tightly to her breast.
Under the spell of love, her eyes close
as she carries Him to the cradle.
She puts to sleep her tired, beautiful Cloud.
The Gopis all bless Child Krishna,
"Live as long as the Ganga and Yamuna Rivers."
Paramananda Das' Krishna
is affectionate with His bhaktas
and also stirs their hearts."²⁴

Lastly, Paramananda Das sang,

Krishna's every limb is crooked.
His gait is crooked as He walks through Gokul.
Where did this handsome Lad come from?
His eyebrows are crooked.
His steps are crooked.
His heart is crooked.
Paramananda Das' Krishna
has covered all the narrow lanes of Vraj."²⁵

Paramananda Das sang many other poems like this.
After having the darshan of Gokul, he became very
attached to that town. He later sang to Shri Mahaprabhuji,
"Keep me in Gokul, near to your lotus feet, so that I can
daily have the sight of Shri Krishna and experience all of
His lilas." Then he sang the following poems of prayer:

This I ask of you, Lord Krishna –
That my heart be like a black bee
hovering at Your lotus feet.
Let my eyes behold Your splendor.
Give me the worship of Your lotus feet.



Let me behold Their two forms,
shining like bolts of lightning in a cloud –
Krishna, the son of Nanda, and Shri Radha,
daughter of Brishabhana, my life's prana and wealth.
Let me live in Vraj and drink Shri Yamunaji's waters.
To serve Shri Vallabh is my oath.
The Gopis' servant, Paramananda Das prays,
"Let me find abundant grace
and sing Shri Krishna's glories."²⁶

Then he sang,

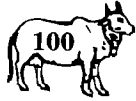
This I ask of you Krishna, Balaram's brother:
To have constant love for Your lotus feet
and to enjoy the gathering of bhaktas.
Give me the association of Your devotees
and residence in Vrindavan
by the banks of the Yamuna."²⁷
Allow me to hear the nectar of Krishna's stories
and to meditate upon the body of Shyam.
May all the devotional wishes of my heart fulfilled.
May I bathe in Yamunaji's pure waters.
Paramananda Das' Krishna is Gokul's hero
and enduring in every way.

Shri Mahaprabhuji was very pleased to hear
Paramananda Das' poems.

3.

Paramananda Das sings before Shri Nathji

Some time later, Shri Mahaprabhu took
Paramananda Das and the whole group of Vaishnavas from
Gokul to the Govardhan Hill. When they arrived that



Krishna's Inner Circle

afternoon, Shri Mahaprabhuji bathed and entered Shri Nathji's temple on top of the Hill. Paramananda Das also bathed, bowed down before the sacred Hill, and climbed up to the temple. There he had Shri Nathji's afternoon Utthapan darshan. After beholding Shri Nathji, Paramananda Das became very attached to His form. Shri Mahaprabhuji then called to him from inside the temple, "Paramananda Das! Sing something for Shrinathji about the Lila."

Paramananda Das considered, "What shall I sing? I have only one tongue, and Shri Nathji's form and lilas are unlimited. Whatever I try to remember, my mind just spins and becomes confused, but because Shri Mahaprabhuji has requested, I'll sing a poem that first describes Krishna's avatar lila, then His forest bower lilas, then praises His lotus feet, glorifies His form, and finally confirms that His lilas are filled with His greatness. Paramananda Das then began to sing,

*Mohan the Enchanter has become the son of Nandaraya.
The Supreme Lord, hero of the intimate glade,
has incarnated for the benefit of His bhaktas.
First I bow to the lotus feet of the Dark Cloud, Gopal.
His cheeks are embellished
with alligator shaped earrings,
His eyes, attractive and wide.
He performs amusing plays with brother Balaram,
for Shesh and Shiva's benefit.
Sings this servant of the Lord of Supreme Bliss:
The Vedas simply say He is
"Not this, not that."²⁸*

Then Paramananda Das sang of his attachment to Shri Krishna,

Paramananda Das



*Today we celebrate. It is a great day.
Mother Yashoda has given birth to Lord Krishna.
Her Son gladdens my heart.
The five sounds reverberate,³⁷
and distinguished persons arrive from every home.
The beautiful women of Vraj
carry festive jugs on their heads.
The cowlads carry buckets of curds,
and all the Gopis proclaim blessings:
"Krishna, live for ten million years."
Paramananda Das' Krishna, the Lord of the world,
is now disguised as a cowlad.*

Paramananda Das then sang,

*In every house, the cowlads cheer.
They play the mridangam, the flute,
dhol, damama and bheri drums.
They loot, seize and devour sweets;
it's a simply indescribable scene.
No one can control them.
Those wild cowlads surround the Vraj maidens,
and no one can say anything to them.
The whole town is decorated with flags,
banners, streamers and festoons.
"Glory, all glories to Krishna!" sings Paramananda Das.
Kamsa's enemy³⁸ has appeared.*

Paramananda Das sang many such songs about Krishna's appearance. At midnight, Shri Gusainji placed Shri Navanita Priyaji in the cradle and commenced with the celebration of His birth. Everyone in the temple dressed up as Nanda Baba, Yashodaji, cowlads and Gopis, and while infant Krishna swung in a cradle, Paramananda Das sang,



Queen Yashoda bristles with joy
 as she puts her Child Krishna in the cradle.
 "Yashoda. Your Son is the gem of your clan and
 equal to the Lord Himself."
 The elders bless Him, while Gopis
 arrive from every town.
 Everyone gathers together, and after receiving gifts,
 they depart singing praises.
 The ten bring the rest contentment.
 Paramananda Das' heart cherishes
 Nanda Baba's great lineage.

When Paramananda Das sang, 'The ten bring the rest
 contentment,' he was referring to Shri Vallabhacharya, Shri
 Nathji, Shri Gusainji and his seven sons. These ten divine forms
 manifested and have given pleasure to the 'the rest,' meaning
 all divine souls. In this way Paramananda Das sang, full of
 devotion.

Afterwards, the groups of Vaishnavas, dressed as
 Nanda Baba, Gopis and cowlads, began to celebrate by
 throwing yoghurt and turmeric at each other.
 Paramananda Das was so transported with bliss that he
 began to dance and, forgetting the order of the ragas, sang
 a poem in the midday Saranga raga in the middle of the
 night!

Today, Papa Nanda is ecstatic.
 The Gopis dance and celebrate boisterously with song.
 They are dressed in yellow and red blouses
 and shiny new saris.
 They adorn their bodies with sandalwood paste and
 the part in their hair with red vermillion.



The cowherders have arrived,
 carrying buckets of milk, curds and butter.
 They play their flutes and drums and sing sweet songs.
 The courtyard is thick with the mud of rice, turmeric,
 milk, yoghurt, and red kumkum powder.
 Everyone is laughing and joking together.
 As love arises in their hearts,
 they embrace each other.
 Great sages chant the four Vedas,
 and five different types of drums resound.
 Supreme Bliss has flooded Gokul and delights my heart.

After singing that song, Paramananda Das became
 so absorbed in love that he fell to the ground unconscious.
 Shri Gusainji lifted up the poet with his own lotus hands
 and while reciting a Vedic mantra, sprinkled some water
 over him. Only then did the love which had been stirred
 up in Paramananda Das' heart settle down and become
 firmly established in his heart. He then experienced all of
 Shri Krishna's lilas and began to sing again. Shri Gusainji
 graced Paramananda Das in this way. Paramananda Das
 then sang the following song about Child Krishna swinging
 in the cradle:

Yashoda is rocking Krishna in a cradle.
 She waves her hands in celebration around her Child,³⁹
 Who affords bliss to the residents of Vraj.
 Brahma and other gods long for and seek
 Child Krishna's crimson lotus feet.
 Yashoda contemplates her fortune
 as she gazes at His lotus face.
 He is the Lord of the entire world and rides on Garuda.⁴⁰
 For Paramananda Das, Krishna, the Son of Nanda,
 is the Master of supreme Bliss.



Krishna's Inner Circle

In this poem, Paramananda Das reveals that Bhagavan Shri Krishna who rides on the Garuda bird is the Lord of the entire world, but it is Krishna as the Son of Nanda and Yashoda whom Paramananda Das considers to be, as he sings at the end of the poem, 'my Master.'

Shri Gusainji was delighted with Paramananda Das after hearing his song. Paramananda Das then sang the following poem in the evening melody of Kanharo, although it was still morning. In the state of love, it is not the order of ragas, but the divine sequence of lila which prevails. Therefore, as the lila unfolded before Paramananda Das, so it arose clearly in his heart, and he sang accordingly.

*"Yashoda, may well-being prevail in your home.
Listen, Yashoda: when you bathe your Child,
don't let a single hair fall from His head."
Some chant the auspicious Vedas.
Some sing, and others laugh.
While gazing at His lotus eyes and face,
the heart delights in the joys of love.
As all the Gopis give their blessings,
some are consumed by extreme bliss.
Sings Paramananda Das, "Nanda's home is ecstatic.
A Son is born - Krishna, a world celebrity."*

After Paramananda Das sang this poem of blessings, Shri Gusainji put his eldest son, Shri Girdharji in charge of Shri Navanita Priyaji and took Paramananda Das to have the sight of Shri Nathji. Seeing the festivities in Shri Nathji's temple and everyone throwing yoghurt and turmeric, Paramananda Das again became immersed in the nectar of lila. Shri Gusainji had offered Rajbhog and was exiting



Paramananda Das

the temple when he saw Paramananda Das in this divine state and commented, "Just as Kumbhandas is perfectly immersed in Krishna's youthful lilas, so Paramananda Das has attained total focus upon Krishna's child lilas."

Paramananda Das then bowed to Shri Gusainji. At the bottom of the Govardhan Hill, he again prostrated to Shri Nathji's flag on top of the temple and then proceeded to his hut by the Surabhi Lake. Paramananda Das then stopped speaking and became totally absorbed in the nectar of Krishna's appearance festivities. Considering that the time had come to leave his body, he laid down and went to sleep.

Meanwhile, Shri Gusainji waved the Rajbhog Arati lights before Shri Nathji and finished the afternoon seva. Shri Gusainji then asked the temple staff, "I didn't see Paramananda Das in the temple during the midday Arati. Where has he gone?"

One Vaishnava replied, "Maharaj! Today Paramananda Das looked out of sorts, and he wasn't speaking to anyone. He went to lie down by Surabhi Lake."

Shri Gusainji then took that Vaishnava with him and went to Surabhi Lake, where he put his hand on Paramananda Das' head and said, "Paramananda Das, I know where your heart is. Now it will be difficult to find you."

The poet then prostrated himself before Shri Gusainji and sang the following poem:

*Love the Son of Nanda.
In fortune and disaster, He protects.
Through His grace, we live.
He is supremely generous, a clever wish-fulfilling gem
for those who remember and serve Him.
He knows all inner movements.*



*Keep me in the shade of His lotus feet.
The Vedas, Puranas, and Bhagavatam describe
how He fulfilled the desires of His bhaktas' hearts.
Sings Paramananda Das, "The poor Brahmin, Sudama,
found riches as great as Indra's heaven."*

In this poem Paramananda Das is praying to Shri Gusainji, "You always shower nectar blessings over those who adore you. You are supremely compassionate and protect your bhaktas with the shade of your lotus-like hands. You have given me your darshan and put your lotus hand on my head, fulfilling my heart's desire. It is just as all the Vedas and Puranas explain, that you always bless your bhaktas with bliss. Like once, when the Lord could not find anyone to fill Indra, the lord of heaven's position, He took over that position and then blessed His poor Brahmin friend Sudama by giving him as much wealth as Indra. In that same way, you have graced me with the priceless gift of Shri Krishna, His supremely blissful form and His Vraj lilas. How could I ever adequately praise you?"

Shri Gusainji was very pleased to hear this poem. Then a Vaishnava asked Paramananda Das, "Reveal to me the means by which Shri Krishna will become pleased and shower His grace upon me. I will do whatever you suggest."

Paramananda Das happily replied, "There is one easy solution; if you listen carefully, you will attain the desired fruit." Paramananda Das then lovingly answered that Vaishnava's question by singing him this poem about Shri Mahaprabhu, Shri Gusainji and his seven sons:

*In the morning, when you wake,
sing the glories of Shri Vallabhacharya.
He has manifested to grant the gift of devotion.
His son, the great Gusainji, is lovely.*



*Shri Girdharji is like Krishna: a rising sun.
What can be said of Shri Govindaji?
He is concentrated bliss!
Fair Shri Balkrishnaji plays like a child.
Shri Gokulnathji speaks of the Path of Grace.
Cupid is shamed when he sees Shri Raghunathji.
Shri Yadunathji is the fully manifested Lord.
Shri Ghanshyamji fulfills all desires
and contemplates scripture.
Panduranga Vitthalesh chants the Vedas.
Sings Paramananda Das,
"The gods in their heavenly chariots
become spent when they see this lila."*

After hearing that poem, Shri Gusainji asked Paramananda Das, "Where is your mind now?" Paramananda Das responded by singing this kirtan:

*Radha is sitting there, arranging Her bindi,⁴¹
contemplating the form of Krishna, Nanda's Son.
The deer-eyed Radha adorns Herself with flowers.
Mirror in hand, She arranges Her
necklaces and jewelry.
Without Krishna, Her day passes like an eon.
Recollecting Her dalliance with Hari,
love for the dark, lovely Shyam
stirs within Her heart.
When the day is over at last
and night engulfs the land of Vraj,
She encounters the Mountain Holder, Krishna.
This lovely Vraj maiden is elated
to be with the Master of supreme bliss.*



Meditating thus upon the plays of the divine couple, Paramananda Das left his body and entered into Krishna's eternal Lila. Shri Gusainji returned to town, bathed, and went up the Govardhan Hill to Shri Nathji's temple, where he completed Shri Nathji's afternoon and evening seva. He then returned to his home at the bottom of the Govardhan Hill. After the Vaishnavas had cremated Paramananda Das and performed his last rites, they came before Shri Gusainji and eulogized the poet.

Shri Gusainji then said to all those present, "In the Path of Grace, there are two oceans: one is Surdas, and the other is Paramananda Das. Their hearts are filled with the unfathomable ambrosia of the Lord's Lila and overflow with devotional jewels." Shri Gusainji thus praised the great bhakta-poet in his own words.

Paramananda Das is a vessel of Shri Mahaprabhuji's grace, and Shri Nathji was always pleased with him. His life story can never be fully told. It is beyond words, so what else can be said?



Kumbhandas

Introduction

Of the eight poets, Kumbhandas and his son, Chaturbhujadas were the only natives of the Govardhan Hill region, though all eight Ashta Chaap eventually lived and sang by the sacred Govardhan Hill, *Shri Girirajji*. The Govardhan Hill is not only the greatest Krishna devotee, but also the very form of Krishna Himself. Kumbhandas received the direct grace of the Lord and was blessed with the experience of Shri Nathji even before he met his guru Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya. His son, Chaturbhujadas, experienced Krishna's lilas from infancy!

Unlike Surdas, Paramananda Das, and Govinda Swami, who had their own followings before becoming disciples of Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya, Kumbhandas was a simple Vrajvasi¹ who kept totally to himself. He survived on the grains from his fields and the berries that grew on his land.

Kumbhandas was so enamored by Shri Radha and Krishna's intimate play that he never praised anything beside the union lilas of the divine Couple. He never left the Govardhan Hill, the area of Shri Krishna's intimate play, not even to venture to Gokul, the sacred site of Krishna's infant lilas only twenty kilometers away. Kumbhandas is a unique character. In the history of religion he is, to my knowledge, the only individual to be invited by the Lord Himself to take part in a cooking contest. Kumbhandas was even invited on Shri Krishna's butter-stealing crusades. He



ate only the grains from his own field, used a bowl of water for a mirror, and shunned everything that was not directly related to his Lord. This made him a perfectly renounced, fearless Lila connoisseur.

Shri Krishna is attained according to the devotional view of His bhaktas. If King Kamsa could achieve Krishna simply by fearing Him twenty-four hours a day, it is no surprise that Kumbhandas could grasp Shri Krishna and become His own, and even make Krishna come before him, through the strength of his devotion and love. He attained perfect friendship and intimacy with Shri Krishna.

While living the life of a farmer, Kumbhandas achieved what cannot be attained by great yogis. Kumbhandas naturally forgot about the *mayic*, false world and lived in a state of God-intoxicated addiction. In that enlightened space, he could not leave his beloved Shri Nathji for even a single day. Once, after having not seen Shri Nathji for just a few hours, he sang, "How many days have passed without seeing Him!"

Throughout the accounts of the Ashta Chaap, we see how their world became the playground of the blessed Lord. Their attainment was never through practice; accomplishment is always through *bhava*, an exact devotional sensibility that touches Shri Krishna in such a way that a true response is reflected back into the bhakta's heart and world. *Bhakti*, devotion for the blessed Lord, can first be understood and then gradually integrated into one's life. It can also be attained through careful study of the lives of great bhaktas like Kumbhandas. Their bhava and love for the blessed Lord should be emulated and understood from the divine reactions they received from Shri Krishna. Kumbhandas' life account reveals how Shri Krishna continually awarded the poet an array of divine responses.



Kumbhandas

In the Lila, Kumbhandas is Krishna's friend Arjuna during the day and at night becomes the Gopi Visakha Sakhi, who belongs to Shri Swaminiji's group of Gopis. Another form of the Gopi Visakha manifested on earth as Shri Mahaprabhuji's disciple Krishnadas Meghan, who always accompanied Shri Mahaprabhuji on pilgrimage around India. In the same way, Kumbhandas always remained with Shri Nathji by the Govardhan Hill.

Of the eight doors around the Govardhan Hill (as described in Surdas' story), the Lila-door where Kumbhandas is the head of the seva is located near the town of Anyor. Kumbhandas was born near the Govardhan Hill in the town of Yamunavata,² so named because the Yamuna River flowed past it in Lord Krishna's time. Long ago, during the Sarasvat Kalpa, the Yamuna River split into two separate flows in the Vraj region. One passed by Kumbhandas' town of Yamunavata and then continued towards the modern day city of Agra, while the other flow passed by Chir Ghat and then the town of Gokul before merging with the other flow.

The Yamuna River flowed by Kumbhandas' town of Yamunavata and then the Govardhan Hill. That is why in the Rasa-panch-adhyayi (the five chapters of the Shrimad Bhagavatam which describe the Rasa Lila) it is described how Krishna and the Gopis first danced the Rasa at Chandra Sarovar, the Moon Lake. Then Shri Krishna disappeared from the Gopis and hid within their hearts, because they began to proudly consider themselves the best women on earth. As the Gopis searched for Krishna, asking all the vines and trees where their



Beloved had gone, they went from the Moon Lake towards Govinda Lake and then Apsara Lake, where they spotted Shri Krishna's footprints in the sand. The footprints of Shri Krishna can still be seen at Apsara Lake.

Meanwhile, Shri Krishna had taken the lovely Radha aside and dallied with Her alone near Rudra Lake, arranging her ornaments and adorning her eyes with khol and the part of her hair with red sindura. There, near Rudra Lake is the Baajani stone that shows the divine imprints of Radha's sindur powder and khol. When Radha also became filled with pride, insisting that She could no longer walk, She tried to climb up onto Shri Krishna's shoulders. Krishna instantly disappeared from Her as well, and She began to cry out, "Beloved, delighter of my soul, mighty armed One, where are You? Where are You? O friend, reveal Yourself to this poor servant of Yours." At that spot, there is a lake called Rudra, which means 'to cry.'

The other Gopis found Radha by the Rudra Lake, and from there they all ventured deeper into the Vrindavan forests, all the while asking the trees where their Beloved had gone. When they came to the banks of the Yamuna River at Yamunavata, they sang their famous Gopi Gita. At the end of that song, having become humble and devoid of all means, they began to cry, and at that moment Shri Krishna appeared before them. Shri Krishna's loving dalliance with the Gopis then commenced, first with the Rasa Lila dance at Parasoli by the Moon Lake, and then with water plays in the nearby Yamuna River. These divine plays all occurred near the Govardhan Hill during the Sarasvat era.

The Gopis went very far in their search for Lord Krishna but never strayed into the darkness they encountered beyond the dense forest of Shyamdak, near the town of Samai. All the sites mentioned in the Rasa Lila as depicted in the Shrimad Bhagavatam can be seen around the Govardhan Hill.



In modern day Vrindavan, which was called Kalidaha Ghat, is 'Bansivat,' where many Rasa Lilas occurred during the Shvetavaraha era. The Sarasvat era Rasa Lila took place, as described above, at Parasoli by the Govardhan Hill, in the autumn season. It was in the spring months of Basant, Chaitra, and Vaisakh that the Rasa took place by Bansivat in Vrindavan. In this way, there are two different Lila locations during the two eras, but the main Rasa Lila of the Sarasvat Era took place by Girirajji.

The Yamuna River which flowed by Kumbhandas' town of Yamunavata also flowed by Sanket, the meeting place of Krishna and Radha between their respective towns of Nandagam and Barsana. Signs of the Yamuna River's earlier presence there can be seen. Nowadays, people lack firm faith, but if they see all these signs and hear of them, their faith will arise. Once the devotional reward is attained, bhava will increase, and that is why I have revealed these truths.

1.

Kumbhandas meets Shri Mahaprabhuji

Kumbhandas lived in Yamunavata but spent a lot of time tending his forefathers' farmlands at Parasoli by the Moon Lake. From childhood, Kumbhandas was unattached to household life. He always spoke the truth, refrained from sin and wrongdoing, and lived the pure and simple life of a Vrajvasi. When Kumbhandas became a young man, he married a woman from Bahulavan who was ordinary and did not have connection with Shri Krishna's Lila. However, the association of the great devotee Kumbhandas could never be unfruitful and ultimately uplifted her. At that time, Shri Nathji had not yet fully emerged from the Govardhan Hill. It is only after Shri Govardhan Nathji began calling Kumbhandas close to Him, and after taking Shri



Mahaprabhuji's shelter, that Kumbhandas became well-known as a Bhagavadiya Vaishnava.*

Once, when Shri Mahaprabhuji was on pilgrimage in the south of India at Jharakhand, Shri Govardhan Nathji appeared to him and said, "I have manifested at the Govardhan Hill. Come retrieve Me from the Hill and establish My worship for the world to see."

Shri Mahaprabhuji halted his pilgrimage there and proceeded directly to Vraj, together with five of his closest disciples: Damodardas Harsani, Krishnadas Meghan, Madhava Bhatt, Narayanadas, and Ramdas Sikandar-Puravare. When they arrived at the Govardhan Hill, they stayed in the town of Anyor, in a hut near Sadu Pande's home. Sadu Pande, his brother Manikachanda and daughter Naro Bhavani became Shri Mahaprabhuji's followers, as described in the appearance story of Shri Govardhan Nathji and the life story of Sadu Pande. Ramdas Chohan, who lived in a cave at the southern end of the Govardhan Hill, also became Shri Mahaprabhuji's follower, and Shri Acharyaji entrusted him with the seva of Shri Govardhan Nathji. These and many other Vrajvasis became followers of Shri Mahaprabhuji.

When Kumbhandas heard that a great being had arrived in Anyor, and that Sadu Pande and others had become his disciples, he told his wife, "Let's go to Anyor and become Shri Mahaprabhu's followers. With his grace, Shri Krishna will bless us."

His wife replied, "I will come along, because I have no offspring. If such a great saint decides to bless me with a child, it will come to be."

Each considering thus, Kumbhandas and his wife and proceeded to Anyor, went before Shri Mahaprabhuji and bowed down before him. Shri Mahaprabhuji directly

*A close, intimate devotee of the Lord



addressed Kumbhandas, saying, "Kumbhandas, you have come?"

Kumbhandas again bowed down and submitted, "I have wandered for so long. Now shower your grace upon me."

As Kumbhandas was a divine soul, he became aware of Shri Acharyaji's divine form simply by beholding him. Shri Mahaprabhuji told them, "Go and bathe, and then I will initiate you both." They bathed in the Sankarshan Lake and then received initiation from Shri Mahaprabhuji.

Kumbhandas' wife then entreated, "Maharaj! You are a great soul. Bless me with children."

Shri Mahaprabhuji happily gave his blessing, "Don't worry, you will have seven."

She was very pleased to hear that, but later, Kumbhandas scolded his wife, "Why did you request only that? You would have received the Lord if you had asked for Him."

She bluntly replied, "I requested what I desired. You go ahead and ask for whatever you want." Kumbhandas then remained silent.

Meanwhile, Shri Mahaprabhuji had a small grass hut constructed on top of the Govardhan Hill as a temple for Shri Nathji. He brought Shri Nathji there and entrusted Ramdas Chohan with His worship. Sadu Pande and the other local Vrajvasis provided milk, butter, and curds for Shri Nathji, and Ramdas lived on those offerings. Shri Mahaprabhuji told Kumbhandas and the other bhaktas whom he had initiated, "Shri Nathji is my all and everything. Remain engaged in His seva and serve Him carefully. Take mahaprasad only after having Shri Nathji's darshan every day."

Kumbhandas had an exquisite singing voice and sang kirtan beautifully, so Shri Mahaprabhuji told him,



"Daily sing kirtans for Shri Nathji, according to the time of day."

One morning, after Shri Mahaprabhuji had awakened Shri Nathji, he said to Kumbhandas, "Sing something about Shri Krishna's Lila." Kumbhandas then sang,

*Krishna! You promised to visit last night,
but You have spent the night somewhere else
and come here just before sunrise?
You hastily picked up her blue shawl,
leaving Your own yellow garments there.
Sings Kumbhandas,
"You may be able to hold a mountain,
but You can't keep a promise!"³*

Hearing this poem, Shri Mahaprabhuji asked, "Kumbhandas! Have you experienced the nectar of Krishna's amorous bower lila?"

Kumbhandas bowed and replied, "Maharaj, all through your grace."

"You are very fortunate that from the very start Shri Krishna has blessed you, by the power of His grace, with intimate knowledge of His Lila. You will always remain immersed in that bliss," Shri Mahaprabhuji told Kumbhandas.

Kumbhandas replied, "Maharaj, shower your grace and bless me with the experience of this best of all nectars." All of Kumbhandas' kirtans were related to the divine Couple. He did not sing about Shri Krishna's appearance day, cradle songs or other childhood lilas.

Shri Acharyaji had interrupted his pilgrimage around India to come to Vraj, gracing Kumbhandas and other Vaishnavas in this way. Soon after, he resumed his



pilgrimage around India for the purpose of uplifting divine souls.

2.

Shri Nathji goes to Tonda Ghana

Everyday Kumbhandas walked from his home at Yamunavata to Shri Nathji's temple at the Govardhan Hill, where he sang kirtans for his beloved Lord, according to the day and time. Shri Nathji began to reveal Himself to the bhakta poet, playing and talking with him.

One time there was a Muslim invasion in Vraj. They came from the west, looting and killing in every town. When they camped fifteen kilometers from the Govardhan Hill, Sadu Pande, his brother Manika Chanda, Ramdas and Kumbhandas considered, "It is not good that these Muslims have come. They hate our dharma. What should we do?"

These four bhaktas were all intimate with Shri Nathji and spoke with Him, so they went to the temple and asked Shri Nathji, "Now what should we do? The Muslims have come to pillage us. Grace us with some command and we will follow it."

Shri Nathji replied, "I want to go to the nearby berry thicket at Tond Ghana. Let's go – you all can take Me there."

They inquired, "How can we arrange that now?"

Shri Nathji replied, "Sadu Pande has a buffalo. Bring it here, and I'll climb up onto its back and ride it." Sadu Pande then brought his buffalo, and Shri Nathji climbed up on it.

That buffalo was a divine soul. In the Lila, the buffalo was named 'Vrinda' and was a gardener for Radha's father. She daily made a flower garland and brought it to the house. One day when Shri Swaminiji (Radha) went to her garden,



Vrinda was feeding her daughter and did not stand up and pay any respect to Radha, nor did she even greet her. At that time Radha did not say anything to Vrinda.

Some time later, Radha told Vrinda, "Go to Nandarayaji's home and tell Shri Krishna that I have come here."

Hearing this, Vrinda replied, "Right now I am making a flower garland for your father, Shri Brishabhanaji, so I will not go and give your message to Krishna."

Shri Radha then said, "When I came here before you did not rise to greet me, and now you cannot even do a single task for me. You are not worthy to live in this garden. Now fall from here and take birth as a buffalo."

After receiving that curse, Vrinda fell at Radha's lotus feet and humbly begged, "Please bless me so I that may one day return here."

Radha said, "Once Shri Krishna climbs up on your back and goes to the forest, you will be accepted. Then you will leave your buffalo form and once again become a Gopi in this garden." That is how the gardener sakhi, Vrinda became a buffalo in Sadu Pande's house.

As they proceeded to Tond Ghana, Ramdas and Sadu Pande each held onto Shri Nathji on the buffalo while Kumbhandas and Manika Chanda cleared the path ahead. There were a lot of thorns, so they had a very difficult time, and their clothes were all torn.

In the middle of the Tond Ghana berry thicket, they came upon a Nikunja bower and a river. Kumbhandas and Manika Chanda went ahead of Shri Nathji and showed the way to go between the thorns and vines. They arrived at a hut by the edge of a small lake. Nearby was an elevated circular dance area.⁴ There, Ramdas and Kumbhandas asked Shri Nathji, "Where do You want to stay?"



"I will stay inside this hut," Shri Nathji replied. So they took the throne upon which Shri Nathji had been sitting on top the buffalo, moved it in the hut, and then seated Shri Nathji upon it again. Then Shri Nathji told Ramdas, "Offer me some food and then go off somewhere else for a while."

Ramdas and Kumbhandas then both thought to themselves, "Shri Nathji must have come here to fulfill the wishes of some Gopi."

When Ramdas gave Shri Nathji a little bit of the food offerings he had brought, Shri Nathji told him, "Offer Me everything you have brought now."

Ramdas had brought two kilos of sweet halva,⁵ so he offered it all. Then he asked Shri Nathji, "I have just offered You everything I brought, but if we stay out here, what will I offer You later?"

Shri Nathji consoled him, "We will not remain here long. What you have offered will suffice."

Kumbhandas and the other bhaktas then left Shri Nathji alone and went to sit amongst some trees. Meanwhile, Shri Swaminiji arrived in the Nikunja bower with some special delicacies She had prepared with her own hands. She went to meet with Shri Nathji, and after some time they had the idea to enjoy some of those special foods.

Shri Swaminiji had taken great pains to prepare all of the food offerings, and therefore Shri Nathji said to Kumbhandas, "It would be pleasing to hear a kirtan about this particular time. Also, I am about to enjoy some food offerings, so you should sing for that reason as well."

Kumbhandas then considered, "The Lord wants to hear something amusing." They were all hungry and full of thorns. Kumbhandas sang,



Krishna's Inner Circle

*You really like this berry thicket?
We are stuck with thorns and burrs,
and our clothes are torn.
A lion scared of a jackal?⁶ That's something new!
Says Kumbhandas, "You are the Mountain Holder!
Who are these invaders? The simple brood
of a lowborn widow."*

Shri Swaminiji and Shri Nathji, as well as the other bhaktas, were all very amused to hear that poem. Then, when it came time to offer Shri Nathji a flower garland, Kumbhandas broke into another song:

*(A messenger appeals to Shri Radha):
"Go and speak to the captivating Shyam.
He is sitting amongst a cluster of lotuses
in the shade of a Kadam tree.
Flowering vines bloom all around Him.
The black bees hum and cuckoos sing."
Hearing the messenger's sweet words,
Radha's heart and body were exhilarated.
Sings Kumbhandas,
"That young lady of Vraj then went to meet
Krishna, the Mountain Holder,
Connoisseur of all nectars."*

Shri Nathji found these poems delightful. Shri Swaminiji then asked Her Lord, "How did You get here?"

Shri Nathji replied, "I climbed up on the back of Sadu Pande's water buffalo."

Seeing the buffalo, Shri Swaminiji blessed it by saying, "That buffalo was my gardener, and after insulting me, she became this animal. Today she has done a great service, so she is redeemed." After that discussion, the divine



Kumbhandas

Couple savored many kinds of love games before Shri Swaminiji returned to Her home in Barsana.

One could question, 'How did Shri Swaminiji reach Tond Ghana if there were so many thorns?' The answer is that in Vraj, the trees and everything else are supremely divine forms filled with Shri Krishna's own essence. According to His wish, Vraj can become covered with vines, fruits and flowers. Sometimes Vraj appears to worldly people as being full of thorns.

Kunjās are the forest bowers where Shri Thakurji plays with the Gopis. The cowlads and followers of the lawful spiritual path are obstructed by thorns and cannot reach that delightful forest. Know that the Vraj bhaktas are forever engaged in loving service of the blessed Lord; of this there is no doubt.

As the four Vaishnavas escorted Shri Nathji to Tond Ghana on the back of the buffalo, they passed many Vrajvasis along the way who did not see Shri Nathji and simply thought, 'These four men are taking their buffalo somewhere.' If not for the thorns, all the Vrajvasis would have come to that secret forest. The nectar of Shri Thakurji's forest bower lilās is exclusively for the pleasure of the Vraj Gopis.

If seen from a worldly angle, by those who do not recognize the divine nature of the Lord, it might appear that Shri Nathji went to Tond Ghana to hide in fear from the invaders. Why would the Supreme Being have to flee from anyone? Where the mood of supreme sweetness rules, as in the Lord, there is only love and no fear. Divine bliss wells within those who view everything from a devotional perspective. Their eyes are filled with insight and divinity, so they experience the nectar of Shri Krishna's perfect Lila.

After Shri Swaminiji returned to Barsana, Shri Nathji called his four bhaktas back to Him.



Here a doubt arises – those four bhaktas who brought Shri Nathji to the thicket were among His intimate chosen ones and had already experienced His divine lila. So why did Shri Nathji send them away to a covered area a slight distance away during His lila with Shri Swaminiji? The answer is that, even if those great bhaktas had assumed their Gopi forms to witness this lila, in their presence Shri Swaminiji would have felt embarrassed and shy as She lovingly fed Shri Thakurji with Her own hand, full of laughter and delight. That is why in the Nikunja bowers, when Radha and Krishna are alone making lila together, all the other Gopis joyfully retreat behind the leaves and vines and take pleasure in beholding the lila from a distance. This is the reason that Shri Nathji sent His four friends to sit a short distance away from His lila with Shri Swaminiji and then afterwards invited them back.

When the four Vaishnavas returned, Shrinathji said, "Have a look and see if the invasion is over."

Sadu Pande then left the thicket to scout and was told that the invaders had gone away. He returned to Shri Nathji and reported, "The invading army came and then ran away!"

Shri Nathji then said, "Now take me back to My temple on top of the Govardhan Hill." The four bhaktas seated Shri Nathji on the buffalo and brought Him back to the temple. After the buffalo had returned Shrinathji to His temple and descended the Govardhan Hill, it left its body and returned to the eternal Lila.

Meanwhile, all the local people excitedly came for Shri Nathji's darshan and exclaimed, "Devadaman⁸ is our great fortune! Through His power, the invasion dispersed in a mere second, as if nothing had happened at all!" Kumbhandas then sang a song before Shri Nathji:



Glories, glories to Krishna
 who held the Govardhan Hill,
 repelling Indra's rainstorm attack
 and destroying his pride,⁹
 removing the anguish of the residents of Vraj.
 Glories to You, Krishna, adorned with golden garments
 bright as lightning.
 Your delicate body has the hue of a water-laden cloud.
 You hold the flute to Your lips and play a melody
 that naturally captures the hearts of the Gopis.
 Glories to the forests of Vrindavan, the land You wander.
 The entire world reveres Your lotus feet.
 By the banks of the Yamuna River,
 Krishna plays and Kumbhandas prays,
 "I bow and take Your shelter."

Then Kumbhandas sang,

By the banks of the Yamuna River
 Krishna forms Rasa Lila dance circles.
 Holding the flute to His lips,
 He plays sweet tunes.
 Groups of Gopis dance with diverse expressions.
 Seeing them, the love god is shamed
 and abandons his conceit.
 The dark Shyam is adorned in a yellow silk cloth.
 The toenails of His auspicious feet
 shine as bright as the moon,
 dispelling the world's darkness.
 His earrings are exquisite.
 His eyes quiver like Cupid's arrows,
 eyebrows arched like a bow,
 ready to fire love's arrows.
 His anklets jingle and His waist bells jangle.



Krishna's Inner Circle

*His voice resounds deeply
like a thundering cloud.
Kumbhandas praises,
"Krishna the Mountain Holder
is spectacular from head to toe."*

Kumbhandas sang many such devotional poems before Shri Nathji, who became very pleased with him. Kumbhandas' songs became famous throughout the land.

3.

Emperor Akbar calls Kumbhandas

People everywhere began to sing Kumbhandas' poems. A certain musician learned one of Kumbhandas' songs and sang it before Emperor Akbar at his palace in Fatehpur Sikri:

*Look! That enchanting Lad, Krishna is coming!
His gait, like that of the elephant Airavati,¹⁰
makes my heart timid.*

His lilting rhythm is unrivaled.

*The cloth around His waist and gorgeous garland
on His handsome chest swindle my heart.*

*His eyebrows are like bows,
armed with the glances from His wide eyes,
which are like Cupid's arrows.*

Dust covers His curly locks.

A saffron tilak adorns His forehead.

Sings Kumbhandas,

*"That attractive young Lad, Holder of the Mountain,
captivates the world with His laugh."*

Kumbhandas



The Emperor, taken with this poem, shook his head in disbelief and exclaimed, "Is there such a great soul on earth who has actually seen this Lord?"

The musician replied, "The saint who composed that poem lives nearby."

The Emperor then excitedly asked, "Where is he?"

"He lives in the town of Yamunavata, by the Govardhan Hill. His name is Kumbhandas."

"Call him here," the Emperor ordered. "I wish to meet him."

The Emperor sent his men, with many types of vehicles, to fetch Kumbhandas. When they arrived in Yamunavata, Kumbhandas was not there, as he had gone to his fields by Parasoli and the Moon Lake. One man from Yamunavata escorted them to Kumbhandas' fields, where they found the poet and informed him, "Emperor Akbar has called you to his palace."

Kumbhandas replied, "I am a poor resident of Vraj. I am no one's servant but Shri Nathji's. What work could I possibly have with your Emperor that requires me to go there?"

Akbar's courier pleaded, "We don't know anything except that the Emperor has commanded us to bring you to him. This horse and carriage are for you. As soon as you are seated on them, we will proceed. If we fail to follow his orders, the Emperor will have us killed, so please, sit in this cart and let us take you to meet him."

Kumbhandas considered, "In that case, it is necessary that I go and suffer the consequences."

Akbar's messengers then said, "Climb up onto this horse or the palanquin and we will quickly go."

Kumbhandas explained, "I never ride on any vehicle. Don't say anything more to me. I will proceed on foot."



Although they implored him repeatedly to sit in the palanquin, Kumbhandas put on his shoes and walked to the Emperor's palace. When Akbar was informed that the great saint Kumbhandas had arrived, he called the poet into his court, "Baba Kumbhandas, enter."

Kumbhandas entered and stood before the Emperor, wearing a ripped shirt, soiled clothes and turban, and worn-out shoes. Akbar told him, "Baba, take your seat."

The palace was sweetly scented, inlaid with pearls and jewels, but Kumbhandas' heart was pained. He thought, "It is as if I have arrived in hell, although I am still alive. My place in Vraj is better than this. In Vraj, Krishna Himself plays lila."

The Emperor spoke, "Baba, you have written many poems about the Lord. Now I would like to hear some. Please sing such a poem for me."

Kumbhandas was angered and insulted by the Emperor's words and thought, "If I don't sing something, they will never release me, but I will never sing about the lilas of my beloved Thakurji in front of this barbarian. What can I sing? Shri Nathji is the One who loves to hear my songs. This man has forced me here, separating me from my Beloved Lord. It would be good to sing something insulting to him. What can he do to me?" Then Kumbhandas remembered the saying, 'Even if the whole world is his enemy, not a hair can fall from the head of one whom Krishna has accepted.' He then composed a poem and sang it for Akbar.

*What can a bhakta possibly gain
by coming to your palace here in Sikri?
While walking here, my shoes became worn
and I forgot Hari's name.
Now I am forced to pay homage to a face
whose mere sight troubles me.*



*Says Kumbhandas, "Without Lala Giridhar,¹¹
this palace is just an abode of lies."*

Hearing Kumbhandas' song, Akbar was at first enraged but then reflected, "If Kumbhandas were greedy, he would have praised me. He is clearly only interested in his Lord." He then offered, "Kumbhandas, ask of me whatever you want, and I will do as you say."

Kumbhandas immediately replied, "Never call on me again." The Emperor then bid Kumbhandas farewell. On his way back from the palace, Kumbhandas began experiencing separation from his beloved Shri Nathji and sang the following poem:

*When will these eyes behold Him?
Every charming limb of my superb Shyam
bestows delight.
Daily He plays in Vrindavan, laughing merrily
with His band of cowlads.
He guzzles the froth of cow's milk.
Kumbhandas laments,
"How many days have passed
since those ecstatic nights?
Now without Krishna, day and night
I am out of sorts."*

Kumbhandas at last arrived at Shri Nathji's temple. The afternoon had passed for him like an age, but now beholding Shri Nathji's face, his sorrows were forgotten. He broke out into verse:

*My eyes are filled with Krishna.
Since the day I beheld Him, I've forgotten everything
and have left my husband and family.*



Krishna's Inner Circle

*Now, without His sight, I am lost.
My every limb reels with emptiness.
When I recall His dark form,
streams of tears pour from my eyes.
Krishna's charm knows no boundary.
Now, how to find Him?
When Kumbhandas meets Krishna,
He embraces Him repeatedly to his heart.*

Kumbhandas then sang,

*This infatuation with Krishna is tough on my heart.
Listen, my friend!
For Him I've purged all shame from this body.
I have lost my religious decorum, and
my clan insults me.
Everyone ridicules me, but why live without
The sight of my true benefactor?
I'm glued to that nectar and cannot leave it
even for a moment.
I'm addicted like the deer to the hunter's veena song.¹²
Sings Kumbhandas,
"Krishna knows the core of my love."*

Shri Nathji enjoyed Kumbhandas' poetry and praised him, "Kumbhandas, you are a blessed one. Just as you cannot live a moment without Me, so without you, everything seems bland." Their love was truly mutual.

4.

Raja Mansingh visits Shri Nathji's Temple

Once Akbar's close associate, Raja Mansingh came to Agra to meet with the Emperor after conquering many lands.



Kumbhandas

Taking the Emperor's permission, Raja Mansingh proceeded towards home, but along the way it occurred to him, "It has been a while since I have bathed in the Yamuna River at Mathura. After visiting the sacred town, I will return home."

Raja Mansingh reached Mathura and bathed at Vishranti Ghat. He then asked some local Chobe Brahmins to take him to have darshan at the famous Keshorayaji temple. Knowing that Raja Mansingh was coming to visit the temple, the priest there adorned Krishna with embroidered blankets and cloth heavily laced with jewels, as well as gold ornaments, even though it was the middle of the hot season. Seeing this, Raja Mansingh thought, "They have covered their deities with jewels just to impress me." Raja Mansingh made a donation at that temple and then proceeded to Vrindavan.

When the heads of the ashrams in Vrindavan heard that Raja Mansingh was coming, they too adorned their Krishna deities with heavy jewels and cloth and gold ornaments. After seeing two or three such large temples and leaving donations, Raja Mansingh returned to his tent, feeling tired from the hot weather. He again considered, "They adorned their deities like that just to impress me."

Later on, he continued on to Govardhan, where someone asked him, "Do you want to have the darshan of Shri Govardhan Nathji?"

"Certainly I do," he answered. When he arrived in the nearby town of Gopalpur, where Shri Nathji's temple sits atop the Govardhan Hill, Raja Mansingh was told, "The afternoon Utthapan darshan is over, but the temple will soon reopen for the early evening Bhog darshan."

He then climbed up to Shri Nathji's temple, his bare feet scorched by the hot rocks, dizzy from the heat by the time he reached the top. When the temple doors opened



and Raja Mansingh beheld Shri Nathji, his eyes were cooled by the sight. During those days, Shri Nathji's divine service was performed with great opulence. As it was the hot season, rose water was splashed all around the temple. Shri Nathji's body was smeared with sandalwood paste. The air was scented with flower oils and circulated by fans. Seeing Shri Nathji adorned with a light white cotton cloth, a few pearl necklaces and other delicate pearl jewelry, Raja Mansingh was cooled to the core of his being and remarked, "This is the true way to serve the Lord. Here, the Krishna who is spoken about in the Shrimad Bhagavatam has personally appeared as Shri Govardhan Nathji and is happily residing in this temple. It is my great fortune to have this vision."

While Raja Mansingh was having this darshan, Kumbhandas was singing poems describing Shri Nathji's form, more brilliant and enchanting than a million love gods:

*When I behold Him,
my eyelids don't even blink.
My eyes stick to His every portion.
My heart is swept away.
How to describe what I see?
I cannot utter a single word!
Krishna, the One who begs for curds,
has taken off with my mind.
Kumbhandas knows
"What delightful things Krishna tells the Gopis
when they meet!"*



Then he sang,

*O, friend! He rules my vision.
How to control these
Khanjan bird eyes of mine?
When He comes down the path,
I can't close them.
O friend, then I become flooded with love.
Day and night I can only think
of all our pleasures.
O friend, my heart shatters
as I search for Him.*

Kumbhandas continued with a third poem:

*He came and stole my heart.
I was just sitting contentedly at home
when I saw His face and forgot about my veil.
Having beheld Him with my own eyes,
I can no longer resist
that treasure of beauty, loving Krishna.
Kumbhandas finds Krishna's every limb
filled with the nectar of love.*

When the temple closed, Raja Mansingh bowed down and then returned to his tent. Later that evening, as the Arati lights were waved before Shri Nathji, Kumbhandas sang,

*Arati lights circle around Krishna's face.
See the beautiful arrangements!
The wicks are heavy with ghee and camphor.
The conch, drums, cymbals, bells
and chimes all sound in harmony.*



Krishna's Inner Circle

*The tongue delights in the fine taste
of singing Krishna's glories.
A horsetail fan is briskly waved
around Krishna's body,
splendid like a billion rising suns,
dispelling the darkness of the world.
Sings Kumbhandas, "My eyes are filled with the form
of my Beloved Lal Giridhar, the Mountain Holder."*

After singing such love filled songs to Shri Nathji, Kumbhandas walked home to Yamunavata. Raja Mansingh returned to his tent and began conversing with his men about Shri Nathji and His ornamentation and worship in the temple. He asked, "Who was that singing before Shri Nathji? His singing really got to me; I have never heard anything like it."

One local Vrajvasi then said, "His name is Kumbhandas. He eats only the grains he grows himself. You must have heard that Emperor Akbar once called him to his court, but Kumbhandas took nothing from him. He is indeed a great saint."

Raja Mansingh, anxious to meet the poet, said, "It is already nighttime, but tomorrow morning I will go and meet with this Kumbhandas."

The following morning, Raja Mansingh began to walk around the Govardhan Hill. He reached the Moon Lake just after Kumbhandas had bathed there and left for his fields. Meanwhile, Shri Nathji had suddenly appeared in the fields, and Kumbhandas called out to Him, "Baba! Come closer!"

Shri Nathji came and sat in Kumbhandas' lap and affectionately said, "I have come here to tell you something special." At that moment, Raja Mansingh arrived. Shri Nathji quickly got up and ran off to hide behind some nearby trees.

Kumbhandas



Raja Mansingh approached Kumbhandas, greeted the poet, and sat down. Kumbhandas' gaze, however, remained fixed on the spot where his beloved Shri Nathji was hiding, and he did not even glance at Raja Mansingh. Meanwhile, Kumbhandas' niece was coming to bring him some breads and sweet porridge when a Vrajvasi told her, "Quickly go to your uncle! A king has come to meet him and will surely offer some gifts. Take whatever he offers, for you know that your uncle Kumbhandas won't even touch his offerings."

She quickly proceeded to the meadow, where she saw her uncle's gaze transfixed, staring towards a tree. She called out to him, "Uncle Kumbhandas! A king is sitting next to you. Why don't you greet him?"

Kumbhandas replied, "What do I care if someone has come and sat next to me? [Kumbhandas then said to Shri Nathji] You were about to tell me something when You suddenly ran away. Now are You going to tell me or not?"

Shri Nathji then signaled to Kumbhandas, "I am delighted with you. Don't worry, I will tell you what I'm thinking later."

Kumbhandas was consoled by Shri Nathji's words. No one else could hear or see Shri Nathji and Kumbhandas talking. Kumbhandas then said to his niece, "Bring me my seat and mirror. I wish to make my tilak."

"Uncle Kumbhandas!" she answered, "A buffalo calf has eaten your seat and drank your mirror."

Kumbhandas replied, "Well then, if you could make a new mirror and bring it to me, that would be great."

Hearing this exchange, Raja Mansingh puzzled, "How does a buffalo calf eat a seat and drink a mirror?" He then watched as Kumbhandas' niece spread out some grass for her uncle to sit on and poured water into a small



owl. Kumbhandas sat on the grass and applied a tilak to his forehead while looking at his reflection in the water. Raja Mansingh then understood what had happened, and he thought to himself, "Kumbhandas is indeed impoverished. He doesn't even have a proper seat or a mirror. I heard about his renunciation, but now I have seen it for myself."

Raja Mansingh then called for a gold mirror studded with costly jewels and presented it to Kumbhandas, "Use this mirror to make your tilak."

"O brother!" Kumbhandas exclaimed, "Where will I keep such a costly mirror? Ours is a thatched roof house made of mud. Someone trying to steal this costly ornament might kill us. I don't want such a thing."

The king thought, "True, what will he do with an expensive object like that, and where could he sell it even if he wanted to? Instead, I will gift him enough money for him to live for the rest of his life."

He then placed a bag of a thousand gold coins in front of Kumbhandas. The poet responded, "I don't need your money. I eat the grains I grow in my fields and don't want anything else."

Raja Mansingh declared, "Then I will give you the entire town of Yamunavata!"

Kumbhandas flatly refused, "I am not a Brahmin and will not take your charity. If you want to offer gifts, find some Brahmins. I don't want anything from you."

In a last effort, the king requested, "Tell me, who is your grocer? I will arrange payment for all your goods for the rest of your life."

"My grocer and I have the same disposition," replied Kumbhandas.

"Tell me where he lives so I can pay him," the king implored.



Kumbhandas motioned toward two distant trees and explained, "Those are my grocers. In the hot season the Karila tree gives me flowers and *tanti* berries, and during winter that Bera tree supplies me with unlimited berries."

Raja Mansingh lauded the poet. "You are blessed. The trees are your grocers! I have seen great renunciates before, but never a renounced householder. There is none equal to you upon the face of the earth." Bowing to Kumbhandas, the king then pleaded, "Please give me some command. I will consider it my great fortune to follow whatever you say."

Kumbhandas then asked, "Will you really do what I say?" When the king promised, Kumbhandas rebuffed him, "Never come to me again, and never talk to me."

As Raja Mansingh was leaving he again bowed to the poet and praised him, "In my travels all around this world, I have seen many false devotees. I have only seen one true follower of the Lord, and you are that one."

After Raja Mansingh left, Kumbhandas' niece complained, "We don't have a single possession. Why didn't you accept anything the king offered?"

"Sit down, you foolish girl!" Kumbhandas reprimanded. "If Shri Nathji hears you, He will be enraged and consider that 'Kumbhandas' niece is a very greedy girl!"

Taken aback, his niece replied, "I was only joking. I didn't really want anything."

Kumbhandas scolded her, "One should never even joke about wanting things like that."

Shri Nathji suddenly appeared again before Kumbhandas and, sitting in the poet's lap, asked, "What has happened to you in such a short time? Tell me why you are so anxious." Kumbhandas replied in verse:



Krishna's Inner Circle

O Krishna! You are the great love of my life.
 Never stray from these eyes!
 As long as I live, let me always see You.
 I bow to Your feet again and again.
 Don't allow my mind to wander elsewhere.
 When I am worried, let me embrace You.
 My beloved Krishna, Son of Nanda,
 Expert in love's nectars –
 You are surrounded by intimate ones
 who relish Your love.
 Extinguish all my misery.
 My enticing Shyam, why hesitate?
 Come, abide in my home.
 Sings Kumbhandas,
 "You are the Holder of the Mountain.
 Why were You afraid of that man?"

After listening to this song, Shri Nathji put His arms around Kumbhandas' neck and said, "Kumbhandas, I've come here to tell you something!"

Intrigued, Kumbhandas replied, "Please tell me! You were about to tell me before, but unfortunately that king came, and You ran away. Since that moment, I've been wondering what it is You wanted to say."

Shri Nathji began to explain, "Kumbhandas! Today there is a contest between all of My friends, to see who can cook the most delicious meal for Me. Will you also participate and prepare some special food offering for Me?"

Kumbhandas questioned, "Is there anything in particular You would like?"

Shri Nathji replied, "Barley porridge, milk, yoghurt, and millet roti breads with pickled tanti berries."

"We have all of those items at home!" Kumbhandas affirmed.

Kumbhandas



"Quickly bring it all here," Shri Nathji told Kumbhandas.

After Kumbhandas told his niece what to bring, she mentioned, "I have already brought yoghurt, millet flour and tanti berries. There is some warm milk at home, but I was going to use that to make more yoghurt."

"Don't make more yoghurt," Kumbhandas instructed. "Run home and bring me that entire jug of milk and barley for the porridge."

Kumbhandas then began preparing Shri Nathji's meal. First he cooked thick, salted millet roti breads, and when his niece returned with the milk, he prepared sweet barley porridge. As Shri Nathji's other friends arrived with their picnic lunches, Kumbhandas placed all of his offerings close to Shri Nathji. The blessed Lord then tasted all of their treats.

Shri Krishna's intimate sakhi, Shri Visakhaji, then took Kumbhandas' milk, mixed in some sugar, and served it first to Shri Swaminiji, which gave that milk an exceptionally sweet taste. Why did she do that? Because Kumbhandasji is a manifestation of Shri Visakhaji herself.

Shri Nathji found Kumbhandas' offerings very tasty. As He was enjoying the offerings, Kumbhandas sang,

*These tanti berries are the supreme fruit of Vraj.
 They can be prepared as a vegetable or pickled
 and eaten with millet roti breads.*

*Taking a basket in hand,
 the daughter of an elder herdsman
 goes out to pick some tanti berries.*

*Sings Kumbhandas, "On the way she is embraced
 by young Mountain Holder Krishna."*



Then he sang,

*Lunch has been brought from every house,
in a variety of sour, sweet and delicious preparations.
Krishna's group of friends
gather in the forest haven's thick shade
by the banks of the Yamuna.
The Gopis and cowlads praise everything they taste.
Young Krishna and brother Balaram serve the others,
using both of Their exquisite hands.
Krishna savors everything.
He places food directly into the mouths of His friends,
stealing the Gopis' hearts away.
Tanti berries, vegetables, pickles, rotis, milk, yoghurt
and delicious sweet porridge –
Kumbhandas' Krishna is immersed
in all the nectarous flavors.
Now He dances to the clapping of hands.*

Kumbhandas sang while feeling the intense pleasures of that lila. He reflected, "How fortunate that Shri Nathji told me about the food contest and then gave me the experience of that lila." Shri Nathji truly blessed Kumbhandas.

For the rest of the day, Kumbhandas remained absorbed in the supreme joy of that lila, unaware of anything else. When he regained outer awareness later that afternoon, Kumbhandas remembered that he had not yet had Shri Nathji's darshan in the temple. He immediately ran from Parasoli to the Govardhan Hill, his heart filled with divine longing. When he reached the temple, the food offerings were being removed and the temple doors were closed. Kumbhandas despaired, "When will I have Shri Nathji's blessed sight?"



As the temple doors opened for Shayan darshan, Kumbhandas' eyes became immediately fixed upon his beloved Shri Nathji, and he sang,

*Our eyes met and became four.
Ravaged, I just stood there,
forgetting the shawl covering my breasts.
I came to Nanda's house with no pretensions,
and there I beheld the beautiful Shyam.
My gaze fell upon Him and became riveted.
My feet were immobilized – I just stood there.
Love for that Charmer of even the love god
surged within me;
I forgot about my household duties.
Sings Kumbhandas,
"Now I am greedy for Krishna's nectar,
even if it means transgressing the righteous path."*

Then he sang,

*I celebrate Krishna, the Son of Nanda.
When I see His dark, adorable form,
I discover true joy.
My tongue sings the delightfully pure praises
of the Master of my world.
Kumbhandas offers his body, mind
and absolutely everything else
to the Mountain Holder.*

Kumbhandas continued with a third poem:

*Every moment His excellence increases.
O, friend! Whenever I glimpse His constantly new form,
my gaze can't remain on any single part.*



*What can I say? I can never find His end,
no matter how much my mind tries.
Kumbhandas' Krishna is the final fortune,
King of exalted tastes. He resides above my head.*

Kumbhandas sang many such nectar-filled poems about Shri Krishna, for he was a vessel of grace and a great bhakta.

5.

The Saints of Vrindavan meet Kumbhandas

Once, Shri Hita Harivamsh, Shri Haridas¹³ and some other Vaishnava saints from Vrindavan came to Girirajji (the Govardhan Hill) to meet Kumbhandas, for they had heard that Shri Krishna spoke directly with him. They also knew that he sang the glories of Shri Swaminiji and thought, "We also sing the praises of Shri Radha. Let's find out how Kumbhandas praises Her."

When they found Kumbhandas, they immediately asked, "We have heard many of your poems about Radha and Krishna, but never a poem only about Shri Radha. Now please sing for us a song about Shri Radha." Kumbhandas then sang,

*Young Radha, you embody ultimate fortune.
A billion moons could never compare to Your face.
My heart does not even question whether the*

*eyes of a billion khanjan birds and deer
could compete with Your own.*

*A billion plantain trees cannot equal Your thighs.
The waists of a million lions are discarded*

as unfair comparisons to Yours.

*The gait of a billion elephants is nothing next to Yours.
A billion jugs cannot compete with Your breasts.*



*The noses of a billion parrots cannot equal
the beauty of Your own,
nor can a billion jasmine flowers rival Your teeth.
A billion ripe bimba fruits are tossed aside
when compared to Your lips.
A billion snakes cannot match Your braids.
A billion pigeon necks are discarded
as unfair comparisons to Yours.
A billion lotuses are not a proper simile for Your hands.
I cannot find in this world any suitable analogy
for Your beauty.
Exclaims Kumbhandas, "Radha, You are
amazing from head to toe."
How long can I keep comparing?
Even Krishna, the Mountain Holder, declares,
'My pleasure lies in beholding Her every second.'¹⁴*

Hearing Kumbhandas' song, the Vrindavan saints exclaimed, "We have composed many poems about Shri Swaminiji, in which Her beauty had been likened to the moon and other things, but you have compared her face to a billion moons! You saw nothing in this world that could adequately compare to Shri Swaminiji's beauty, and therefore you described Her in this most amazing way."

After bidding Kumbhandas farewell, the Vrindavan saints returned to their homes, while Kumbhandas remained totally absorbed into the mood of young, amorous Krishna. Kumbhandas was a blessed vessel of pure grace.

6.

Shri Gusainji asks Kumbhandas to accompany him to Gujarat

One time, Shri Gusainji decided to travel to Dwarka with the intention of uplifting the divine souls living in those far



away lands. After asking permission from his Child Krishna, Shri Navanita Priyaji, Shri Gusainji left Gokul and proceeded to the Govardhan Hill. After making Shri Nathji's ornamentation and other seva, Shri Gusainji enjoyed his meals and then retired to his baithak, where all of his disciples came to pay their respects.

In the course of conversation, some Vaishnavas began to tell Shri Gusainji about Kumbhandas' poverty, "These days, Kumbhandas' household is in great poverty. He has to support his seven sons as well as their wives, his niece and his own wife. He also uses his limited resources to extend hospitality to any bhakta that happens to pass by. They survive only on the scarce grains from his farm in Parasoli and *tanti* berries."

Shri Gusainji made a mental note of this matter. Shortly thereafter, Kumbhandas arrived and bowed to Shri Gusainji. Shri Gusainji saw that he remained standing, and so he said, "Kumbhandas, come, sit down."

After the other Vaishnavas left, Shri Gusainji told Kumbhandas, "I am on my way to Dwarka and will meet with many Vaishnavas. I have received many letters from them earnestly requesting me to come, so it is necessary that I go. If you would join me, I will not suffer the separation from enlightened souls. Being together with a great bhakta such as you is time well spent, and we will certainly learn something through your association. I have also heard that you have some financial difficulties. This trip will also solve all of those problems for you."

Kumbhandas humbly replied, "Maharaj! Before you, what can I say? I will do as you say."

By then it was afternoon, so Shri Gusainji bathed and entered the temple to perform Shri Nathji's afternoon and evening seva. When he returned to his baithak that evening, Shri Gusainji advised Kumbhandas, "Return home



now. Tomorrow after Rajbhog Arati, we will leave for Dwarka."

Kumbhandas returned the following morning. After Shri Gusainji awoke Shri Nathji and completed his morning seva, ornamentation, lunch offerings and Arati, he took leave from Shri Nathji and set out for Gujarat, accompanied by a number of bhaktas. They set up camp for the night just nearby, at the far end of the Govardhan Hill by the Apsara Lake, intending to continue their journey the following morning. Kumbhandas began to reflect, "What can I do? No one can know the distress I feel at being separated from Shri Nathji, the Lord of my life." Contemplating in this way, the mood of separation grew in Kumbhandas heart.

That afternoon, when Kumbhandas remembered that it was time for Shrinathji's afternoon Utthapan darshan, Kumbhandas' eyes filled with tears, and every hair on his body stood on end in ecstatic bliss. Leaning against a tree just outside of Shri Gusainji's tent, Kumbhandas began to sing softly of his anguish:

*How many days have passed
since I last beheld Him?
On amorous young Krishna's face,
a light moustache is emerging.
His beauty, the splendor of His face,
outshine a million moons.
His glance and enchanting smile –
His elegant dancer's garb!
O, how my heart anticipates my lovely Krishna's
arrival, our meeting and play!
Kumbhandas laments,
"Without Shri Nathji, my life is worthless."*



Shri Gusainji overheard Kumbhandas' song of separation. Unable to bear the poet's distress, Shri Gusainji emerged from his tent and saw Kumbhandas' eyes streaming with tears. He declared, "Kumbhandas! Your far-away journey has been completed. Now go back to the temple and see Shri Nathji."

Shri Gusainji told Kumbhandas to return, because knew that, 'Shri Nathji must be missing you as much as you miss Him.' This divine condition is exemplified in the account of the bhakta Gajjandhavan, a disciple of Shri Vallabhacharya.¹⁵ One day, Shri Mahaprabhuji's wife, Shri Akkaji sent Gajjan to purchase some betel leaves for their Child Krishna, Shri Navanita Priyaji. Gajjan could not stand to be without Shri Navanita Priyaji for even a moment. The moment he stepped outside, the fever of separation arose within him, and he fell unconscious in the street by a shop just outside the temple door.

Meanwhile, in the temple, Shri Mahaprabhuji had just offered Rajbhog to Shri Navanita Priyaji, who told Shri Mahaprabhuji, "I will only enjoy My lunch after Gajjan returns."

When Shri Mahaprabhuji asked everyone where Gajjan had gone, Shri Akkaji explained, "I sent him out to get some betel leaves."

"Why did you send him out?" Shri Mahaprabhuji asked. "Don't you know that Shri Navanita Priyaji cannot remain without Gajjan for a single moment?"

Shri Mahaprabhuji sent someone to find Gajjan, and upon his return, Gajjan went before Child Krishna and requested, "Please partake of Your lunchtime offerings." Only then did the blessed Lord enjoy His lunch. Until Gajjan returned, Shri Navanita Priyaji simply sat there in a state of separation.

This is the way of Shri Acharyaji's blessed path: if a bhakta has singular, divine focus upon the Lord, then the Lord



Himself will respond towards that special follower with the same mood. As Lord Krishna explained to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita, "As My bhaktas worship Me, so I worship them."

Therefore Shri Gusainji told Kumbhandas, "Just as you are experiencing the affliction of separation from Shri Nathji here, so Shri Nathji is experiencing the pain of separation from you. Therefore, quickly return to the temple to see Him. Your far-away journey has now been completed."

Hearing Shri Gusainji's words, all the hairs on Kumbhandas' body stood erect with total joy, and the fire of his separation cooled. He bowed to his guru and quickly ran back from Apsara Lake to Shri Nathji's temple, where the doors had just opened for the afternoon Utthapan darshan. Kumbhandas entered the temple singing:

Listen, O friend!

How can anyone who yearns to meet
the Lover remain without Him,
even when faced with a thousand obstacles?
Those who feel divine mutual separation
in their hearts are never phased
by worldly guilt or family constraints.
For those attracted to the form of Beloved Krishna,
nothing else will suffice.
Sings Kumbhandas, "Without my Giridhara Lal,
each moment passes like an age."

Shri Nathji was pleased to hear this kirtan and then praised Kumbhandas, "I understand your heart. As you cannot remain without Me, neither can I live without you. From now on, you will always stay near to Me."

Kumbhandas delightedly prostrated to Shri Nathji and prayed, "That is exactly what I wanted! It was my



true desire to never be separated from You again." Kumbhandas was such a vessel of grace and a great bhakta.

7.

One and a half sons

Once, when Kumbhandas and some other Vaishnavas were sitting with Shri Gusainji, the guru said in a joking mood, "Kumbhandas, how many sons do you have?"

Kumbhandas replied, "One and a half."

"I thought you had seven sons!" Shri Gusainji questioned.

"Maharaj," Kumbhandas explained, "Of my seven sons, five are attached to the ways of the world, so I don't count them. I have only one full son, and that is Chaturbhujadas. Then there is Krishnadas, whom I count as half a son, as he does the seva of tending Shri Nathji's cows."

Here the doubt arises, 'Why did Kumbhandas call Krishnadas only a half son? After all, the young boy performed the supreme seva of guarding Shri Nathji's cows, a service through which many others have found Lord Krishna.'

Shri Vallabhacharya's Pushti Marg is the path of Krishna devotion in the footsteps of the Gopis. A great bhakta has sung:

*"For the benefit of beings living in this world,
Shri Mahaprabhuji revealed the ways in which the Gopis
lovingly worship Shri Krishna."*

So what are those ways? When they are near their Beloved, they serve Him. In that experience of His blissful form, they become absorbed in the nectars of union. When Shri Krishna goes out during the day to herd His cows, the Gopis experience



the mood of separation and sing His praises. A 'full bhakta' is one who, like the Gopis, experiences both the mood of union and separation. One who experiences only one of those moods is a 'half bhakta.'

Krishnadas tended Shri Nathji's cows and did indeed have the darshan of Shri Krishna, but he did not know the secret lilas which the Gopis experience in the state of separation. Therefore, Krishnadas' father considered him to be a half son. Chaturbhujadas experienced the nectars of Shri Krishna's union and separation and was able to use that personal experience in the seva by singing kirtans about Krishna's Lila.¹⁶ That is why Kumbhandas considered him a full-fledged son.

Hearing Kumbhandas' words, Shri Gusainji agreed, "Kumbhandas, you are right. An accomplished devotee is a true son. Of what use is any other kind of son, regardless of what he does?"

Chaturbhujadas' story is found in the account of Shri Gusainji's 252 Vaishnava disciples. Now hear about the story of Kumbhandas' son, Krishnadas.

8.

Krishnadas

Shri Gusainji personally gave Kumbhandas' son Krishnadas the service of herding Shri Nathji's cows. After carefully cleaning and sweeping out the entire cowpen, he would take the cows out to the forest for the entire day and then bring them back home in the evening. Once day while returning to the cowpen, Krishnadas was walking behind one large cow which lagged behind the rest. This cow walked very slowly, as she was heavy and had large udders which yielded an enormous quantity of milk. By the time they reached Punchari, the southern end of the Govardhan



Krishna's Inner Circle

Hill, all the other cows but this one had returned to the cowpen.

Suddenly, a tiger emerged from a cave on the Hill and made a run at the cow. Just as the tiger was about to pounce on the large, slow cow, Krishnadas jumped in front of the aggressive beast and shouted, "Unrighteous one! This cow belongs to Shri Nathji! If you are hungry, then eat me instead." Krishnadas goaded the cow to make her run quickly back to the cowpen. The cow returned safely, while the tiger killed Krishnadas.

Back at the cowpen, the cowherders had begun milking the cows. Gopinathji, a great bhakta cowlad and vessel of grace, then beheld Shri Nathji in the cowpen milking the large cow whom Krishnadas had saved. He saw Krishnadas as well, holding the cow's calf while its mother licked it. Kumbhandas was there at the time and had that same sight. Shri Nathji finished milking the cow and returned to His temple, where Shri Gusainji offered Him supper.

Kumbhandas also left the cowpen and walked towards the temple, but when he reached Dandavati Shila, at the base of the Govardhan Hill, someone informed him, "Your son Krishnadas has just been killed by a tiger!"

When he heard this news, Kumbhandas fell to the ground unconscious. Many Vrajvasis and Vaishnavas rushed to his aid, but no one was able to bring Kumbhandas back to his senses.

Someone went to Shri Gusainji and told him, "Maharaj! A tiger killed Kumbhandas' son Krishnadas, but he saved the life of one of Shri Nathji's cows. When the tiger attacked, Krishnadas gave up his body where it now lies, abandoned, at Punchari."

Shri Gusainji interjected, "Don't say it like that. That cow could never have left Krishnadas there."



Kumbhandas

It is said that when a person saves a cow at the end of his life, that cow will come and carry that individual to the supreme realms. Krishnadas indeed saved one of Shri Nathji's cows, so that cow would never abandon him.

Shri Gusainji then asked, "Where is Kumbhandas?"

One Vaishnava replied, "Maharaj, Kumbhandas was very saddened by his son's passing; he fell down unconscious at Dandavati Shila when he heard the news. Many people have tried to revive him and called out to him, but Kumbhandas remains unconscious and has not uttered a single word."

After Shri Gusainji finished Shri Nathji's seva, he came down to where Kumbhandas was lying. All the people who were standing around said to Shri Gusainji, "Kumbhandas is a great bhakta, but the death of a son is a great tragedy and no one is spared from such sadness."

Shri Gusainji explained, "What do you know? It is not his son's death that pains Kumbhandas so greatly. He is upset because he will not be able to have Shri Nathji's darshan during *sutak*, the period of observance after the death of a relative.¹⁷ He has fallen down because of that grief. Now I will remove your doubts about Kumbhandas."

In order to reveal the character of an enlightened bhakta, Shri Gusainji then called out, "Kumbhandas! Come tomorrow morning, and I will arrange for you to have Shri Nathji's darshan."¹⁸

Hearing his guru's welcome words, Kumbhandas immediately arose and fully prostrated to Shri Gusainji, saying, "Other than you, who could know my heart so well!"

Shri Gusainji assured him, "I know that nothing worldly can affect you. A Vaishnava who has your association for even a moment becomes freed from



mundane suffering, so how could you be affected by anything worldly? Now go perform your son's last rites. In the morning, come to the temple for Shri Nathji's darshan."

Shri Gusainji then returned to his home, where many Vaishnavas gathered around. The cowlad Gopinathji came and told Shri Gusainji, "Krishnadas was killed by a tiger near Punchari. But just after that, in the cowpen, I saw Shri Nathji milking a cow and Krishnadas holding her calf!"

"What is so surprising about that?" Shri Gusainji said. "Krishnadas was such a great bhakta that he allowed a tiger to kill him in order to save Shri Nathji's cow. Shri Nathji became pleased with Krishnadas and accepted him into His eternal Lila. Because you are a good bhakta, you were granted that rare sight. It would be difficult for others to have that darshan." All the bhaktas present were pleased to hear the guru's words about the power of seva.

The following morning, Kumbhandas came to Shri Nathji's temple for darshan. Shri Gusainji told the temple sevaks, "First let Kumbhandas have Shri Nathji's darshan. Afterwards everyone else can come in." Shri Gusainji bestowed his grace upon Kumbhandas in this way.

Normally, people who are in a state of sutak are not allowed to enter into any temple, so how could Shri Gusainji allow Kumbhandas to have darshan? To this day, due to the grace of Kumbhandas, people in sutak are allowed to have Shri Nathji's darshan in the temple before everyone else. Through this custom, established on that day itself, Shri Gusainji affirmed that the bhaktas have great love in their hearts. In the future, who will be able to recognize such love? Therefore he ensured that future bhaktas will be free to have darshan of Shri Nathji even in the period of sutak. In this way, both the Lord and His devotees are pleased.



Kumbhandas had Shri Nathji's darshan for most of the day before returning to Parasoli in the evening. There, he sang poems of separation to his beloved Shri Nathji:

*Gopal, it hurts when I don't meet You.
The beautiful Vrindavan lady is very anxious
to encounter Krishna.
In the Beloved's separation,
her condition has deteriorated.
Cool moonbeams scorch her like fire.
Lotus petals are like snake's venom.
Flowers and sandalwood paste are no longer pleasing –
they just intensify the blaze in Her body.
Says Kumbhandas, You are the fresh Shyam,
and she is a golden vine.
Without You, she withers as if it were summertime.*

Then he sang,

*The days and nights last as long as mountains.
Since Krishna left for Mathura, time stands still.
Now the Creator makes a few hours pass like an age.
I wake all night.
Why won't this separation leave me?
It has become my companion.
The Vraj bhaktas are very delicate.
Now they are baffled and lifeless,
like a lotus that has just suffered a frost.
This separation from You is painful.
Now, without Giridhar Krishna, my eyes
are continually filled with tears.*



Then he sang,

*Others remain close,
while my own lot is separation.
Friend, while others sleep blissfully,
my yearnings fly in four directions.
I can't comprehend the Creator's plan –
What was vexing him when he wrote my fate?
Day and night, Kumbhandas
repeats Krishna's names.
"I am like that Chataka bird
who just thirsts only for its cloud."*

Kumbhandas passed his days of 'sutak' singing these and other songs of separation. After some days he was returned to his daily seva of singing to Shri Nathji in the temple as before. Such was the nature of Kumbhandas' devotion.

9.

Kumbhandas is taken to Gokul

On one occasion, Shri Gusainji's sons Shri Gokulnathji and Shri Balkrishnaji approached their father and said, "Kumbhandas has never gone to Gokul! We should take him there to have the darshan of Child Krishna, Shri Navanita Priyaji."

Shri Gusainji answered, "Kumbhandas is thoroughly absorbed in the intimate lilas of Shri Nathji on the Govardhan Hill."

"Let us try to bring him to Gokul," said Gokulnathji, "and if he will not come, we will know that it is Shri Nathji's wish."



"Go ahead and try," Shri Gusainji answered, "but Kumbhandas will never cross the Yamuna River, and Gokul is on the other side."

Some days later, Shri Gusainji went to Gokul, and Shri Gokulnathji and his older brother Balkrishnaji stayed behind in Shri Nathdvara. It was the eleventh lunar day of the bright half of the month Vaishakh (late April). Gokulnathji said to his older brother, "Shri Gusainji is in Gokul, and we are here. Why don't we try to take Kumbhandas to Gokul today?"

Balkrishnaji questioned, "How will we take him? You know Kumbhandas will not sit upon a horse or any other vehicle!"

Shri Gokulnathji explained, "Yes, that is true. And during the day, he will never leave town and miss the chance for Shri Nathji's darshan. The nights are bright now, so we will go tonight by foot. Let's just see what happens as we walk. This will be a great excuse for us to benefit from his enlightening association."

That evening, after the two brothers completed Shri Nathji's seva, Shri Gokulnathji took hold of Kumbhandas' hand and began to talk about the divine moods of Krishna's lilas. Kumbhandas immediately became absorbed in the nectar of devotion and lost all awareness of where he was. Shri Gokulnathji led Kumbhandas down the Govardhan Hill to Anyor and on towards Gokul. Shri Balkrishnaji and a few other Vaishnavas walked along, silently listening to Kumbhandasji and Shri Gokulnathji's discussion. At one point, Shri Gokulnathji asked Kumbhandas, "Does Shri Nathji ever personally make Shri Swaminiji's ornamentation?"

Kumbhandas, engrossed in the love of the divine Couple, began explaining, "Yes, yes, She does. One night, during the autumn, Shri Nathji and Shri Swaminiji,



accompanied by Shri Lalitaji and other Gopis, went out to the forest to pick flowers. When they came to the place of the Rasa dance circle, the divine Couple took their seat on a special ornamentation throne, and Visakhaji Gopi began to make Shri Swaminiji's ornamentation. Shri Nathji then requested, 'Tonight, I will adorn Her.'

"Shri Nathji then stood up and moved behind Shri Swaminiji. The clever Gopi Visakhaji understood the divine Couple's hearts, and knowing that they cannot remain for long without seeing each others' faces, she held a mirror in front of Swaminiji. Now they could behold each others' countenance, and they began to gaze at each other.

"Shri Thakurji then combed Shri Swaminiji's long dark hair and began to thread thin pearls into Her hair, with supreme skill. But when he saw the lustrous moonlike face of Shri Swaminiji in the mirror, He was so delighted that Her hair slipped from His hand, causing all the pearls to slip off and scatter upon the ground. Everyone began to laugh, and the Gopis commented, 'It took You so much time to arrange those pearls, and now they have been removed in one instant!'

"Shri Nathji then said to Visakha Gopi, 'You take hold of Shri Swaminiji's hair while I lace it again with pearls.'

"Shri Thakurji again arranged the pearls into Shri Swaminiji's braid and upon her crown. Meanwhile, some other Gopis had made flower ornaments and handed them to Shri Nathji. As He adorned Shri Swaminiji with the flowers, every second He beheld Her splendid moonlike face, and He became thrilled with bliss in His every pore. In this way, Shri Thakurji completed Shri Swaminiji's ornamentation, tracing Her eyes with khol, placing a bindi on Her forehead and henna upon Her feet. Afterwards, Shri Swaminiji Herself made His ornamentation, and then They delighted together in many kinds of love play."



While Kumbhandas related the intimate pastimes of the divine Couple, they reached the banks of the Yamuna River across from Gokul. The sun had risen, and Shri Gusainji boarded a boat in Gokul and crossed to where Kumbhandas and his sons had arrived.

Kumbhandas regained his outer awareness, having been absorbed in the nectarous lilas of the Lord, and realized that morning had dawned. When he saw Shri Gusainji, he released his hand from Shri Gokulnathji's grip and began to frantically run. He thought to himself, "Who will sing to Shri Nathji this morning? I have lost my Shri Nathji seva!" He ran as fast as he could back towards Shri Nathji and the Govardhan Hill.

Shri Gokulnathji, Shri Balkrishnaji and the other Vaishnavas tried to chase after Kumbhandas, but he ran so fast that no one could catch up with him. When they came back to Shri Gusainji, he said, "How do you expect to catch him? Why did you bring Kumbhandas here? As I told you before, he will never cross the Yamuna River."

"What does it matter that Kumbhandas didn't cross the Yamuna?" said Gokulnathji. "It was supremely divine to spend the entire night in the mood of Shri Thakurji's lilas. It was our great fortune, for it is rare to have the association of a great bhakta like Kumbhandas even for one moment."

Shri Gusainji said, "What you say is true, but now Kumbhandas has to run back to the Govardhan Hill. Shri Nathji will not awake until Kumbhandas returns and sings the kirtans of awakening. That is how dependent Shri Nathji is upon His bhaktas. Therefore, if you want to hear about Shri Nathji from Kumbhandas, visit him at his home in Yamunavata. There, Kumbhandas will enlighten you."

Gokulnathji, Balkrishnaji and all the Vaishnavas then proceeded to Gokul. Shri Gusainji had his swift horse



saddled with him, so he mounted the horse and quickly chased down Kumbhandas. When he reached the running poet, Shri Gusainji called out, "You have never been this way; you will get lost. Run behind my horse."

Kumbhandas followed Shri Gusainji all the way to the Govardhan Hill. By that time, it was about two hours after the sun had risen. Shri Gusainji dismounted from his horse, immediately bathed and proceeded to the temple. When he saw that the temple priest and cooks were just walking up the Hill to start the morning seva, he asked the head priest, Ramdas, "Why are you so late today?"

Ramdas explained, "I don't know what is wrong today. We have all had to bathe four times, because after each bath, some impure physical contact occurred and made us lose our ritual purity. This is now our fifth bath."

Shri Gusainji explained, "Shri Nathji Himself has orchestrated this, all for his bhakta Kumbhandas." Shri Gusainji then sounded the conch to wake Shri Nathji, while Kumbhandas sang a song of awakening.

Kumbhandas was overjoyed and mused, "I did not miss my singing seva for Shri Nathji."

Shri Gusainji completed Shri Nathji's morning seva. The next day was the appearance day of Shri Nrisinghji, so Shri Gusainji prepared the delicate saffron cloth and Kulah¹⁹ to adorn Shri Nathji in the next day's seva. Shri Gusainji stayed in Shri Nathji's seva for the entire day.

In this way, Kumbhandas remained immersed in Shri Nathji's nectar lilas and never in his life visited the nearby town of Gokul. He was a totally accomplished devotional soul and vessel of grace.



10.

Darshan in the Temple

Once, while Kumbhandas was sitting in his fields, Shri Nathji arrived and started playing in front of him. When it became time for the temple to open for the afternoon Utthapan darshan, Kumbhandas got up to leave for the Govardhan Hill. Shri Nathji asked him, "Where are you going?"

Kumbhandas replied, "I am going to the temple to have Your darshan."

Shri Nathji then objected, "Why would you go there when I am playing right here in front of you?"

Kumbhandas explained, "At the moment, through Your grace, You are here playing with me, but if You suddenly decide to run away, I couldn't stop You. In the temple, however, You were established by Shri, Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya, and You can't leave. You give darshan to everyone there. It is actually because I am so attached to seeing You in Your temple that You now grace me by coming to my home. Through the intensity of Your temple darshan and my kirtan seva there, You bless me by personally appearing to me here. That is why it is essential for me to go have Your darshan in the temple."

The blessed Lord laughed and said, "Kumbhandas! Your devotional sentiments are very divine, and that is why I can't leave you for a single moment."

Kumbhandas and Shri Nathji then set out together for the Govardhan Hill. When they reached Govinda Lake, the conch sounded to announce the afternoon darshan. Shri Nathji immediately entered His temple, while Kumbhandas slowly climbed up the Hill from Anyor. When he reached the top of the Hill, he had the darshan of Shri Nathji residing in His temple.²⁰ Kumbhandas was such a great bhakta.



11.

Kumbhandas offers Shri Nathji Mangoes

One day, a gardener came to Parasoli with a large basket of two hundred beautiful mangoes. He set the basket down on the ground at Chandra Sarovar, the Moon Lake, and began to clean each mango with a cloth. Kumbhandas was returning from Shri Nathji's temple after Rajbhog darshan and came to the lake to drink some water. Seeing the beautiful mangoes, fit for offering to Shri Nathji, Kumbhandas asked, "How much are they?"

The gardener replied, "I am taking these mangoes to Mathura, where I will get ten rupees for them."

Kumbhandas did not have any money, so what could he do? At that moment, he remembered Shri Nathji in his heart and said, "These fruits are supremely luscious and worthy to be enjoyed only by You, for You alone relish what is of the highest quality. Partake of these wonderful mangoes."

Shri Nathji then came and enjoyed the mangoes, but because their physical appearance was in no way altered, the gardener was unaware. He packed up the mangoes and took them to Mathura. One Rajput man from the nearby town of Math had come to Mathura for some business and saw the mangoes. "How much are those mangoes?" he asked.

"I will take no less than ten rupees for them," the gardener replied.

The Rajput purchased all of the mangoes for ten rupees and proceeded to the banks of the Yamuna River, accompanied by one Sanodhiya Brahmin. They each ate fifty mangoes and set aside the rest for their homes. That evening, while they slept in a nearby shop, both men dreamed of Shri Nathji. When the Rajput awoke, he asked the Brahmin, "O Brahmin! Did you see something?"



The Brahmin replied, "I had the darshan of Shri Nathji in my dream!"

"Where does Shri Nathji reside?" asked the Rajput.

When the Brahmin replied, "Shri Nathji lives twenty one kilometers from here, on top of the Govardhan Hill."

The Rajput then exclaimed, "You fool! You have actually seen His form, and still you wander uselessly in other places? I have just seen Him in a dream and now cannot remain without Him. I'll give you all these mangoes and five rupees if you will take me to Shri Nathji's temple in the morning."

The Brahmin agreed. The following morning, after the Brahmin took the one hundred mangoes to his home, the two men set out together for Shri Nathji's temple. They arrived just in time for Shri Nathji's evening darshan.

The Rajput's mind and heart were captured by Shri Nathji. After the darshan was over, the Rajput gave the Brahmin his weapons, garments and five rupees, keeping only ten rupees for himself. The Brahmin returned home to Mathura, while the Rajput put on a dhoti and stood at Dandavati Shila at the bottom of the Govardhan Hill. When Shri Gusainji passed by after finishing the seva, the Rajput bowed humbly before the guru and prayed, "I have wandered about uselessly for such a long time. Now accept me and keep me close to your feet."

Shri Gusainji told him, "You are very fortunate. This condition of yours is due to the grace of Kumbhandasji."

Shri Gusainji then returned to his room and there initiated the Rajput into Shri Krishna's shelter. When the Rajput tried to offer his guru his last ten rupees, Shri Gusainji told him, "Keep it. You don't have any money, because you gave it all to that Brahmin."

The Rajput prostrated before Shri Gusainji and said, "Maharaj! Now that I have taken your shelter, of what use is this money to me? I will do whatever you say."



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Later, the Rajput asked Shri Gusainji, "Maharaj! In my previous birth, who was I, and what pious deed allowed me to have your sight?"

Shri Gusainji explained, "In your previous birth, you were a cowlad in Vraj. You carried a weapon to protect Krishna's father Nandarayaji's cows. One day you killed a snake, and due to that sin, you had to take many samsaric births. Yesterday you purchased some mangoes which Kumbhandas had mentally offered to Shri Nathji. Those mangoes became mahaprasad after Shri Nathji came and enjoyed them. When you ate the blessed mangoes, being a grace-filled soul, your mind turned, and Shri Nathji gave you His darshan in a dream. The Brahmin guide who was with you also had darshan in his dream, but because he is not a grace-filled soul, he did not achieve the wisdom that you did.

"In the Lila, your name is Nena. Now you should again become an armed guard for Shri Nathji's cows. I will supply you with clothes and a weapon, and you should take mahaprasad every day from Shri Nathji's temple. Fast today, and tomorrow I will perform your dedication to Shri Krishna by initiating you with Brahma Sambandha." The Rajput bowed to Shri Gusainji and took his leave.

The following day, after adorning Shri Nathji, Shri Gusainji brought the Rajput before Shri Nathji and initiated him with the Brahma Sambandha mantra. His mind became pure. Shri Gusainji gave him prasadi clothes* to wear and a weapon, and from that day, the Rajput rode a horse and guarded Shri Nathji's cows as they grazed in the fields. Shri Nathji's form became fixed in his heart, and soon he began to the darshan of Shri Nathji playing amongst His cows. The Rajput became an enlightened bhakta and a great vessel of grace.

* Clothes that Shri Gusainji himself had previously worn



Kumbhandas

In this account, Shri Nathji enjoyed the mangoes which Kumbhandasji mentally offered to Him, and from eating those blessed mangoes, the Rajput received the Lord's grace. This confirms that Shri Thakurji always lovingly accepts the offerings given to Him by His accomplished bhaktas. Such mahaprasad is divine, so what else can be said?

Some days later, the Rajput's two sons came to visit him. He told them, "I am a soldier and would have uselessly lost my life in some battle, but the Lord has graced me. Now consider that your father is dead. Go home and take care of the household, and don't wait for me; I will never return." His two sons returned home and informed everyone, "Our father has become a renunciate. Now what shall we do?" Then the sons too left their false attachments to worldly life, yet they remained in the home and carried on with their lives.

This account reveals the teaching that a divine soul who takes mahaprasad and has the darshan of great bhaktas becomes accomplished.

Kumbhandas was such a great bhakta that by simply mentally offering mangoes to Shri Nathji, the Rajput received divine favor. Therefore, consider the actions of bhaktas to be divine. Why? Because Shri Nathji falls under the sway of His bhaktas.

Kumbhandas' wife and five worldly sons were connected to Kumbhandas only by name, but they too became liberated through his association. Kumbhandas' niece was also widowed at a very early age, which spared her from worldly attachments.



Kumbhandas' niece is a divine soul. In the Lila, she is 'Sarovari,' a friend of Shri Visakhaji [the Lila form of Kumbhandas]. In this world, after her parents died, she lived with her uncle Kumbhandas and thereby attained the association of a great bhakta. Therefore, Shri Nathji even gave her darshan and personally appeared before her, blessing her with divine experiences.

12.

Shri Gusainji's Birthday

One time just before Shri Gusainji's birthday, Shri Nathji thought to Himself, "Shri Gusainji celebrates My appearance day with all the other bhaktas in this world, so this year I Myself will arrange for Shri Gusainji's birthday party!"

The day before Shri Gusainji's birthday, Ramdas was adorning Shri Nathji, and Kumbhandas sat nearby singing about His ornamentation. Shri Gusainji was in Gokul at the time. Shri Nathji then spoke to Ramdas, "Shri Gusainji celebrates My appearance day with great festivity, so this year I wish to do the same for him. Gather everyone together for a festival. Tomorrow is his birthday. Serve Me special offerings tomorrow."

"What should we make?" Ramdas asked.

"Delicious *jalebi* sweets."²¹

Ramdas and Kumbhandas replied, "Terrific idea!"

After Ramdas completed the daily seva, he called all the temple sevaks together and told them, "Tomorrow, on Shri Gusainji's birthday, a special offering will be made to Shri Nathji."

Sadu Pande offered, "Take from me whatever ghee and flour you need for the festival." Kumbhandas immediately returned home. As he had nothing in his home



to contribute to the festival, he sold four of his buffalo calves to a Vrajvasi for five rupee and gave that money to Ramdas. Everyone from the temple gave one or two rupees, which enabled Ramdasji to purchase the sugar needed for the preparations. They stayed awake all night preparing the *jalebi* sweets.

In the morning, Ramdasji gave Shri Nathji a massage and bath, as is the custom on festive days, and adorned Him with saffron clothes and a Kulah which Shri Gusainji had prepared with his own hands and sent from Gokul. Then the food offerings were made, and Shri Nathji requested of Kumbhandas, "Sing something in praise of Shri Gusainji's birthday!" Kumbhandas sang,

Today there is a celebration by Shri Vallabh's door.

*The Supreme Being has appeared as Shri Gusainji
to spread the grace-filled path.*

A fortune has arisen for grace filled souls:

He uplifts those who rely on no other means.

*Sings Kumbhandas, "Shri Krishna, Shri Vallabhacharya,
and his son, Shri Gusainji embody the essence
of all Vedic practice."*

Then he sang,

*Shri Vallabh has come again to spread the nectar of seva
and to reveal secret knowledge.*

He purifies his own souls.

Festive banners hang in every home.

*Sings Kumbhandas, "The bards praise the greatness
of Shri Krishna's glories."*

Kumbhandas went on to sing many other poems in praise of Shri Gusainji, which greatly pleased Shri Nathji.



Meanwhile, in Gokul, Shri Gusainji also offered Shri Navanita Priyaji a massage, bath, and saffron garments. After offering Him lunch, Shri Gusainji rode his horse to Shri Nathji's temple. When he arrived, Ramdas told Shri Gusainji, "Lunch has just been offered."

When the time came to remove the offerings, Shri Gusainji bathed and entered the temple, where he was amazed to see many baskets full of jalebis. He inquired, "What festival is it today that inspired you to offer all these sweets?"

Ramdas explained, "Shri Nathji wanted to celebrate your birthday today. Everyone in the temple helped in the preparations."

After Shri Gusainji removed the offerings and waved the Arati lights, he returned to his room at the bottom of the Govardhan Hill. He summoned Ramdas and asked him, "How was it possible to offer so many jalebis today? There are only a few sevaks in the temple, and they are not wealthy."

Ramdas explained, "The ghee and flour came from Sadu Pande. Kumbhandas gave five rupees, while everyone else gave one or two rupees, as much as they could afford. In all, we collected twenty one rupees and used it to buy the sugar."

In the meantime, Kumbhandas arrived and bowed to Shri Gusainji. "Kumbhandas!" Shri Gusainji called out, "Where did you get those five rupees? I am aware of the scarcity in your home."

"What do you mean, 'my home'?" said Kumbhandas. "My home is at your lotus feet. I had four extra buffalo calves, so I sold them. Only when one's body, life breath, house, wife and children can be used in your divine service can the devotional Vaishnava dharma be achieved. I am a worldly householder, so how could I attain



the Vaishnava dharma? Knowing me to be humble, you have graced me."

Shri Gusainji's heart was filled with love to hear the poet-saint's words, and he commented, "Such humility can be found only in those whom Shri Mahaprabhuji has graced, like Kumbhandas. Then Shri Nathji always falls under their sway." Kumbhandas was indeed a vessel of grace.

13.

Shri Mahaprabhuji teaches Kumbhandas

Another time, Kumbhandas asked Shri Mahaprabhuji for the philosophical teachings of the Path of Grace. Shri Mahaprabhu then blessed him with explanations of the eighty four devotional infractions, the nature of tamas, rajas and sattvic bhaktas, the ways to perform Shri Krishna's seva throughout the day, and the devotional moods of Shri Krishna's childhood and youthful lilas. Afterwards, Shri Acharyaji explained, "Those souls upon whom Shri Nathji has showered His grace will ask questions like yours and act accordingly. Many great bhaktas will ask you about these matters and follow these ways, but a very difficult time lies ahead, when there will be no one to ask such questions, nor will anyone be able to answer them."

It is said that the lioness' milk can only be kept in a golden bowl. Similarly, the bhava of Krishna's lilas and the devotional dharma can be contained in the hearts of none other than the truly accomplished bhaktas.



14.

Three Daughters

One day, Kumbhandas inquired of Shri Gusainji, "In my home reside my wife, five of my seven sons, and my seven daughters-in-law, but none of them has firm love for Shri Nathji. My niece, however, does have firm devotion. What is the reason behind this?"

Shri Gusainji then told Kumbhandas and all the Vaishnavas present, "Kumbhandas, listen carefully, and I will tell you a story from the Puranas." All those present became very attentive as Shri Gusainji continued, "There was once a Brahmin with a daughter of marriageable age. One day, he requested of another Brahmin, 'Please find a suitable husband for my daughter.'

"Meanwhile, he made the same request of three more Brahmins. So, by the Lord's wish, all four Brahmins set out in different directions, and in nearby towns, those four Brahmins found four husbands for the daughter. Each then reported back to the girl's father, 'I have arranged your daughter's engagement. The auspicious hour for the marriage has been set for the morning, one month from today.'

"The girl's father exclaimed, 'I have only one daughter, and you have made four different engagements. How is it possible for her to marry all four?'

"The four Brahmins replied, 'We only did as you asked. Now, if you do not go through with the marriage one month from today, we will kill ourselves, and the murder will lie on your head. The engagements we have made are unbreakable.'

"The Brahmin father replied, 'Great. After one month, we will see what happens.'



"We will return on the day before the wedding,' the four Brahmins said, and they all returned to their homes.

"The girl's father became intensely anxious. 'How can I get out of this situation?' he thought. 'If I myself die, that would also be ruinous for my daughter. What can I do?' He was so disturbed that he stopped eating and drinking. On the fifth day, he was sitting beside the river performing his prayers when a great bhakta passed by and stopped to bathe. Just then, the Brahmin began to weep and cry out in intense suffering. The hearts of the Lord's bhaktas are soft, so this bhakta could not bear the suffering of the Brahmin. He approached him and asked, 'Brahmin, why are you so anguished?'

"After the Brahmin had explained his situation, the bhakta replied, 'I normally do not remain in any single place, but for you, I will stay here by this river. You must not reveal my presence to anyone. Come to me one day before the marriage. The Lord will arrange everything. Now return home and eat something.'

"On the day before the wedding, the girl's father returned to the bhakta by the river and said, 'The wedding is tomorrow morning. Now please tell me what to do.'

"Come back here this evening,' the saint replied. When the Brahmin came back that evening, the bhakta instructed him, 'Catch whatever birds or beasts pass in front of you and bring them to me.'

"The Brahmin then caught a cat, a dog and a donkey. The bhakta told him to put the three animals into a locked room with his sleeping daughter and then prepare for the wedding'

"The next morning the four Brahmins and four grooms arrived. When the time for the wedding ceremony drew near, the saint told the girl's father to open the door. The Brahmin opened the door and was amazed to see four



girls, each appearing exactly like his daughter, indistinguishable from one another. After the four girls were married and bid their farewell, the girl's father gave appropriate gifts to the four Brahmins. When the bhakta too was about to leave, the father bowed at his feet and prayed, 'You have saved my life, so my home is really yours. Take from here whatever you wish.'

"The bhakta replied, 'I don't desire anything. The Lord has removed your pain. That itself is a great thing.'

"The girl's father then questioned, 'Those four girls look exactly alike. How will I know to which man my real daughter was married?'

"The bhakta explained, 'Invite your four sons-in-law over, and ask them about their wives. The one who describes his wife as having human qualities is married to your real daughter.' The bhakta then continued on his way.

"A few days later, the Brahmin invited his four sons-in-law to his home. As he sat them down one at a time for a meal, he inquired, 'Is my daughter suitable as a wife or not?'

"The first replied, 'Your daughter has all virtues, but she barks like a dog. She can't control her tongue, nor does she have clean habits, so I don't really love her.'

"The father called in the second son-in-law and said, 'Tell me, how do you find my daughter?' This husband replied, 'Although she has some fine attributes, she is gluttonous. She even steals away and eats the food we have set aside for the Lord's offerings, and, like a cat, she does not feel satisfied unless she eats food from five different houses.'

"The father asked the same question of the third husband and met with the reply, 'She has some fine merits, but whenever it is time to leave the house or come back home, she brays like a donkey. She is always dirty, and



kicks me and everyone else with both of her feet, like an ass.'

"Lastly, the fourth son-in-law remarked, 'How can I sufficiently praise your daughter? She is a divine being, like Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth. She speaks sweetly to everyone, is skilled in all tasks, has good manners, and has love for me, the guru, the Lord, as well as the other bhaktas.' The Brahmin then knew for certain that this was the man who married his real daughter. From that day, he invited only that son-in-law and his true daughter to his home.

"So therefore, Kumbhandasji, only a person who has the qualities of a Vaishnava is truly human. What is the difference if someone simply has a human body? Ravana and Kumbhakarana, although human in physical appearance, were demonical. A person's true form should be known through his or her actions. Your niece is a great bhakta. Through your association she will attain spiritual perfection."

Shri Gusainji enlightened Kumbhandas and the other Vaishnavas in this way. Kumbhandas was truly a vessel of Shri Vallabhacharya's grace and an intimate devotee of the Lord.

15.

Kumbhandas' Departure

Eventually, Kumbhandas' body became very weak. One day, as he sat by Sankarshana Lake just below Shri Nathji's temple, his son, Chaturbhujadas approached him and asked, "Shall I carry you back home to Yamunavata?"

"In an hour or so I will leave this body. Until then, just leave me here."

Chaturbhujadas then went to Shri Nathji's temple for Shri Nathji's midday Arati. Shri Gusainji saw him and



asked, "How is your father Kumbhandas? Where is he now?"

Chaturbhujadas replied, "He is sitting by Sankarshana Lake."

Shri Gusainji then went to Kumbhandas by the lake and asked, "Kumbhandas, tell me, what lila are you contemplating?"

Unable to stand, Kumbhandas nodded his head and mentally bowed to Shri Gusainji. He then sang the following poem:

O Friend! Krishna forgot that
He was milking a cow.
Mohan the Enchanter could not divert His gaze
away from Her incomparable, moonlike face.
She is forever new, intriguing and clever –
Her every portion wonderfully formed.
The mind and heart of Kumbhandas' Lord,
Mountain Holder Krishna,
is swept away by Her arched eyebrow.

Then he sang,

Krishna, your gaze has swindled my mind.
Now I can't even traverse the path from
Nandagam to Barsana.
When You look at me with those lovely eyes,
I am overwhelmed, unable to take a single step.
Sings Kumbhandas, "You can hold up a mountain,
so why can't You talk to me?"

"Kumbhandas," Shri Gusainji said, "Tell me, where is your heart now?" The bhakta-poet then sang,



(A messenger is trying to convince Radha to go see Krishna...)

Krishna, Holder of the Mountain,
has tried in so many ways to meet with you.

O, silly one, give me an answer!

What is it with you?

Just see your own beauty, as you sit by the window,
adorned in that shimmering sari.

Your mind and body are entangled with young Krishna.

Your heart cannot part from Him for a moment.

(Radha replies...)

Tell me, friend, by what path shall I proceed?

Where can I find Him?

(The messenger explains...)

Krishna is just over there, in a high terrace
decorated with love paintings.

Finally, Kumbhandas sang,

Amorous Radha is drenched in the mood
of intimate love.

Like a golden vine, she climbs Krishna,
Her dark Tamal tree.

Her love plays with the Mountain Holder are diverse.

Sings Kumbhandas,

"The Mountain Holder's love play is outstanding."

After singing that poem, Kumbhandas left his body and entered the eternal inner Nikunja Lila of Shri Krishna, through a divine door near Anyor. Shri Gusainji then returned to Gopalpur, while Chaturbhujadas and his other brothers performed their father's last rites.

Shri Gusainji appeared saddened and finished Shri Nathji's seva from afternoon to evening without passing a



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single word with any of the Vaishnavas. Ramdas then asked him, "Maharaj, what has happened?"

Shri Gusainji eulogized Kumbhandas, "A great bhakta has disappeared. At this time, bhaktas are concealed in this world."

Kumbhandas was such a vessel of Shri Mahaprabhuji's blessings and a great soul that Shri Nathji and Shri Gusainji remained forever delighted with him. His life story is truly unequalled and inexpressible, so there is no way to fully praise him.

Krishnadas



Krishnadas

Introduction

In my eyes, the most difficult of the eight Ashta Chaap poets to fully comprehend is Krishnadas. Born into a low caste Shudra family in Gujarat, Krishnadas was a complex, divine personality. He was not only a great poet, but also the manager of Shri Nathji's temple, a post given to him by his guru, Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya.

Krishnadas' poetic descriptions of the Rasa Lila are most outstanding. In the Rasa Lila, Krishna dances with His cherished Gopi dairymaids of Vraj in the bowers of Vrindavan, near the dark waters of the Yamuna River, cooled by the rays of the autumn full moon. The Rasa dance is a vast collection of nectars showered upon its participants. It is the manifested, fluid form of the Upanishadic teaching that, "He is divine mood."

What is sometimes bewildering in Krishnadas' life account is that, although he experienced the Rasa Lila, the height of Krishna devotion, at many times in his life he appears arrogant, to the extreme of offending his own guru and fellow bhaktas. Nevertheless, anyone who can experience and sing the praises of Krishna's Rasa Lila is by that virtue alone ultimately absolved of all wrongdoing. Shri Vallabhacharya explains:

When the Lord appears upon the earth, He is the reward for divine souls and accordingly takes on many different types of



manifestations. Sometimes, when the divine soul becomes attached to the false world, or has a false sense of pride, He makes that divine soul appear in the world for purification, and for the purpose of revealing the Path of Grace. Such souls are not plagued by hypocrisy, disease or affliction.

The main teaching I derive from Krishnadas' account is that whatever has happened, is happening, and will happen is perfect and all part of the divine play. Krishnadas appeared upon the earth to fulfill his very particular part in the divine drama, and his inspired poems are a testimony to his exalted position. His pride may have been problematic at times, but his divinely connected vanity allowed him the realization that:

*"Krishna is the Moon and the Gopis the stars,
as they merge in the Rasa dance...
Krishnadas' Lord is the Mountain Holder,
a Prince among connoisseurs."*

In his *Subodhini*, Shri Mahaprabhuji Vallabhacharya makes a most unusual remark regarding the scene in the *Shrimad Bhagavatam* when Lord Krishna is about to reappear before the Gopis during the *Rasa Lila*. He writes: "Krishna became Brahma, then Vishnu, then Shiva, and finally, He became Krishna again."

Krishna became Brahma when the Gopis experienced pride while dancing with Him. Brahma is the divinity who presides over creation and the *rajas guna*, the material quality from which pride arises. When the Gopis developed pride, Shri Krishna disappeared and hid within their hearts.

Next in the Gopi-Krishna Lila, Shri Krishna became Vishnu the Preserver, the divinity of the mode of purity, or



sattva. During this stage, the Gopis realized that it was due to their pride that Krishna left them. Then they started to sing out to their Lord, "Krishna! Victorious is Your appearance in Vraj, where even Lakshmi, the Goddess of fortune, forever takes her refuge."

After the Gopis sang their hearts out, longing for the reappearance of their Beloved, Krishna became Rudra (Shiva). *Rudra* conveys the meaning, 'to cry.' The Gopis realized that there truly is no single means capable of bringing about the manifestation of Krishna. This inspired in them a refined state of humility, and they began to weep for the Lord.

It was after this complete cycle of pride, praise, and tears that Krishna manifested before the Gopis, this time as Beloved Krishna, the most perfect Being, the remover of even Cupid's pride. With His delightful form in place, the dance began again.

The bhaktas' lives, their trials and attainments, can be viewed as both the means and reward. In the Path of Grace, the means of attainment and the attainment itself are never different. Krishnadas' worldly and divine adventures are testimonies to this truth.



Krishnadas

In Shri Krishna's Lila, Krishnadas' form at night is the Gopi Lalita Sakhi, while during the day he is Krishna's cowlad friend, Rishabha. Lalita Sakhi has four forms. As herself, the Gopi Lalita, she is present and experiences the intimate Nikunja lilas of Shri Krishna and Shri Swaminiji. Second is her daytime form as Krishna's cowlad friend Rishabha, who journeys out to the forests every day and experiences the nectars of Shri Krishna's daytime lilas. Lalita Sakhi's third form appeared in this world as Damodardas Harsani, who always remained by Shri Vallabhacharya's side. Shri Acharyaji called him 'Damala.' His story is told in detail in the accounts of Shri Vallabhacharya's 84 Vaishnavas.

Lalitaji's fourth form is Krishnadas, who lived by the Govardhan Hill and became the manager of Shri Nathji's temple. Krishnadas is the main attendant at the Lila entrance door on the Govardhan Hill located by the Bilachu Lake, near the town of Govardhan. That door faces Radha's town of Barsana and the path Shri Krishna takes on His way to dance the Rasa Lila.

In this world, Krishnadas was born into a Kunabi family (of low-caste Shudras) in the village of Chilotara in Gujarat. His father was the head and governor of his town. At the time of Krishnadas' birth, his father called upon learned Brahmins from all the surrounding towns and said, "Tell me about the nature of my newborn son. If you can correctly describe my son's destiny, I will support you financially for the rest of your life!"

The Brahmins told him, "You can give us something if you want to, and if not, then don't. Your son will be the Lord's



bhakta. His name will be 'Krishnadas' – the follower of Lord Krishna. He will not remain in your home." Although Krishnadas' father was very saddened to hear the Brahmins' predictions, he rewarded them with many gifts and named the newborn child 'Krishnadas.'

When Krishnadas was only five years old, he began attending satsangs, where bhaktas would gather and discuss Shri Krishna's lilas. If his parents did not let him attend the sacred teachings, he would cry and refuse to eat or drink. Finally, his parents relented, "We must let him go. Even at this young age, he has already developed a love for renunciates and will soon become one himself. It is all as the Brahmins told us. Therefore let us not become too infatuated and love this child, for it will only cause us suffering."

So Krishnadas passed his childhood listening to Hari's glories wherever they could be found. One day, when Krishnadas had reached the age of twelve or thirteen, a grain dealer arrived and set up his shop on the outskirts of Krishnadas' town. He sold his grains there and made fourteen thousand rupees. That night, Krishnadas' father hired a thief to steal the merchant's money. Krishnadas' father gave the thief one thousand rupees for his work and kept thirteen thousand for himself.

Krishnadas knew what had happened and admonished his father, "Why have you done this evil thing? You will only be liberated from this bad deed if you repay the grain dealer all the stolen money."

Krishnadas' father angrily hit his son and told him, "Don't mention this to anyone! I am the governor of this town, and I can do whatever I want."

Krishnadas replied, "Now you will be ruined," and remained silent.

The following morning, the distressed grain dealer came crying to Krishnadas' father and informed him about the robbery.



Krishnadas' father answered, "Why didn't you stay within the town limits? Now what can I do?" He then summoned his men and instructed them, "Take that merchant who came crying today and throw him out of town." They escorted the distressed merchant, bereft of all his wealth and belongings, outside of town.

Krishnadas compassionately thought to himself, 'I will try to rectify this vicious deed of my father and do right by this foreign merchant.' He ran to catch up with the merchant and called him aside, "Sit down here. I have something to tell you in private. It was my father, the governor, who instigated the theft and stole all of your money. Don't return to our town. Instead, go to Raja Nagar (Ahmedabad) and tell the king what has happened. You can call me as a witness, but tell the king that neither my father nor the thief may be executed, and your money shall be returned."

The grain dealer proceeded to Raja Nagar and related the entire incident to the king, saying "The son of the man who stole my money informed me of all this. Please remedy the situation such that my money is returned without anyone being killed."

The ruler was very impressed, "What an honest son to report his father's crime! I would like to keep such a person in my own service." The king called for fifty men and armed guards and commanded them, "Go to Chilotara and bring me the governor and his son. Do not let them flee."

When they were brought in front of the king in Raja Nagar, the king asked Krishnadas' father, "You are a governor and have robbed a visitor to your town? Return this merchant's money now."

He replied, "Someone must have falsely accused me. I don't know anything about this matter."

The king then questioned, "Will you accept your son's testimony as the truth?"

"Yes," affirmed Krishnadas' father, "My son will tell you the truth."



The king called in Krishnadas and ordered him, "Tell us the truth."

"My father is an embodied soul and therefore subject to fault; but I am compelled to speak the truth. My father stole fourteen thousand rupees from this grain merchant. He gave the thief one thousand and kept the rest. I told him at the time that this was a terrible thing, but he did not heed my words and now faces the consequences. Let my father return the money without further punishment."

The king commanded Krishnadas' father, "You must repay him today, or else you will be executed."

"It is true I have done a bad thing," Krishnadas' father admitted. "Let the merchant come with me to my home right now and I will return his money."

After sending Krishnadas' father and the merchant back to the town, along with two hundred of his men, the king requested of Krishnadas, "Remain here with me. You are an honest man."

Krishnadas replied, "If you keep me here, what will you do when everyone becomes offended by my honesty? Such is the nature of these times; people are offended by the truth. It is better that I become a renunciate. I will not do the work of my father either." The king tried many ways to coerce him to stay, but in the end Krishnadas returned home with his father.

Back in the village, Krishnadas' father called for the thief and told him, "My son has ruined me and reported our crime. Give me back those one thousand rupees now, or else we will both be killed." After the money had all been collected and returned to the merchant, the king appointed a new governor to the town of Chilotara. Krishnadas' father then reprimanded him, "Son! You have done a terrible thing. I have lost my ruling position in this town and all my income."

Krishnadas retorted, "It is you who have committed evil that would have ruined your life here in this world as well



Krishna's Inner Circle

as the next, but at least your life has been spared. It is good that you no longer rule over this town; you would have only incurred more sin."

His father sighed, "You were born a beggar and have now made me one as well! Now what do you think you will do?"

Krishnadas replied, "If you keep me in your home you will become poor, so now let me leave."

"Take some money and go somewhere far away. If I no longer see you, I shall suffer no more," his father declared.

Krishnadas immediately stood up, paid his respects to his father, and left home. He later thought, 'I will go to Vraj and visit all the holy places.' After some days, he arrived in Mathura and bathed in the Yamuna River at Vishrant Ghat.

Krishnadas continued to wander around Vraj and eventually came to the town of Govardhan, where someone told him, "A temple has been built for Devadaman [Shri Nathji]. We Vrajvasis are very pleased that Shri Nathji will be established in His new temple on top of the Govardhan Hill in a few days. Ever since the day He emerged out of the Hill, Shri Nathji has been delighting everyone and fulfilling their heart's desires."

Krishnadas walked towards the Govardhan Hill, eager to have Shri Nathji's sight, and arrived at the temple just as Shri Vallabhacharya was waving the Rajbhog Arati lights before Shri Nathji. As he beheld Shri Nathji, Krishnadas' heart and mind were swindled. Shri Nathji gazed directly at Krishnadas and said to Shri Mahaprabhuji, "Krishnadas has come! He has been separated from Me for so long, and now I am seeing him again."

Shri Mahaprabhuji walked over to Krishnadas and said, "Krishnadas, come!"

Krishnadas prostrated before Shri Mahaprabhuji and requested, "Maharaj! I have come here through your grace. Please give me shelter."

Krishnadas



"Quickly go and bathe," Shri Acharyaji said. "Shri Nathji has been looking in your direction, so come back soon."

Krishnadas ran to the nearby Rudra Lake, bathed, and returned to the temple. Shri Acharyaji sat him down in front of Shri Nathji and initiated him with both mantras of Shri Krishna's shelter and soul dedication (Brahma Sambandh). As Krishnadas was a divine soul, he immediately began to experience all of Shri Nathji's lilas and broke out in verse:

Know that Shri Vallabh uplifts the fallen.

He reveals Lila to those who take his shelter –

Krishna remains with them.

Those who don't know the form of Shri Vallabh
waste their days in useless spiritual practices.

Sings Krishnadas,

"Whoever receives the supreme reward
of his grace-filled glance will never be born again."

Shri Mahaprabhuji enjoyed Krishnadas' poem and then completed Shri Nathji's morning seva. Soon after, on the auspicious day of Akshaya Tritiya, Shri Nathji was established in His new temple. A Vaishnava named Puranmal arranged for the celebrations on that day.

Just after the new temple had been completed, Shri Nathji's head seva attendant, Ramdas Chohan, left his body and entered into the eternal Lila. Shri Mahaprabhuji then called for his disciple, Sadu Pande, and said, "A great new temple has been built for Shri Nathji. Now we need a good person to do His seva; I would like you to do it."

Sadu Pande regretted, "We are simple Vrajvasis and don't know anything about the proper etiquettes and modes of worship. Besides, we have too many household duties. With your permission, I will go to Radha Lake and invite some Bengalis to come here. You can place them in charge of Shri Nathji's



seva. They are engaged in chanting Krishna's name twenty-four hours a day."¹

Shri Mahaprabhuji agreed, "Then call them here."

Sadu Pande then brought twenty to twenty-five Bengalis from Radha Lake. Huts for them to live in were constructed by Rudra Lake, at the bottom of the Govardhan Hill. Shri Mahaprabhuji instructed the Bengalis how to perform the service of Shri Nathji and entrusted them with His *seva*. Shri Mahaprabhuji asked Krishnadas to go out and collect offerings to be used in Shri Nathji's worship and to give that money to the Bengalis.

1.

Mirabai

Some time later, Krishnadas and another Vaishnava went to Dwarka, where they had the darshan of the Krishna deity Shri Ranchorji and collected offerings for Shri Nathji from the bhaktas there. When they passed through the town of the saint Mirabai, they stopped at her home. Many sadhus, saints, heads of ashrams, and swamis from various spiritual paths were all staying there. Some had been there for ten days, others for twenty. None of them had left, as they were expecting to receive some monetary gifts from Mirabai. After meeting briefly with Mirabai, Krishnadas told her, "I must continue on my way."

Mirabai requested, "Why don't you grace us by staying here for a few days?"

Krishnadas declined, "I stay only in places where I can have the association of Shri Mahaprabhuji's disciples. I don't stay with followers of other paths."

When Mirabai tried to give him eleven gold coins for Shri Nathji, Krishnadas refused, "Because you are not Shri Mahaprabhuji's disciple, I will not lay a finger on your gold coins." With that, he got up and left.



The Vaishnava accompanying Krishnadas questioned, "Why did you refuse that offering for Shri Nathji?"

"How was that an offering for Shri Nathji?" Krishnadas explained. "We will receive plenty of offerings for Shri Nathji from the Vaishnavas. Shri Nathji doesn't lack anything." He continued, "And what did all those swamis and saints from other paths get by sitting there in the road? I put them in their place! They will think, 'We have been sitting here waiting for gifts for days but haven't received anything. That low-caste Shudra disciple of Shri Vallabhacharya was offered gold coins, and he refused them! If Shri Mahaprabhuji's follower is so virtuous, just imagine how great his guru must be.'"

"Besides," Krishnadas added, "Why should we accept offerings for Shri Nathji from outsiders?"

In the Shiksha Patra it is mentioned that, "Bhaktas experience great sorrow in the association of those who are contrary to one's spiritual path." Bhaktas who are greatly accomplished find no other suffering besides this. Yet, Shri Thakurji takes care of His own souls, and if a bhakta does not waste words with contrary outsiders, only then does he or she remain happy. By engaging in spiritual discussion with those who are against your path, the nectar of devotion is lost, and a contrary mood arises. It was for this reason that Krishnadas spoke such few words to Mirabai.

The main teaching here is to remain with those of your own spiritual path and no one else. If at some time you must meet with someone else, then keep your devotional dharma secret. Shri Gusainji has advised in his Chatuh Shloki, "When you are out in the world, always keep your personal devotional dharma secret from outsiders. This is my firm opinion."

If you travel to a place where there are no other bhaktas, your devotional dharma can be maintained by not revealing it



to others. In the world there are gutters, so after bathing, you walk carefully so as to avoiding stepping in them. Likewise, those who are exalted must protect themselves in every way. Just as you are careful not to let anyone see the food which is to be offered to Shri Thakurji, to keep it fit for His enjoyment only, so also the Vaishnava devotional dharma must be protected in order for it to remain. That is the teaching revealed here.

Krishnadas was a firm bhakta and supreme vessel of grace.

2.

Removal of the Bengalis

As the Bengalis were responsible for adorning Shri Nathji, Shri Mahaprabhuji entrusted them with all the gold jeweled ornaments, and he had peacock feather crowns, Kaachani dance skirts, and other garments made for the worship. The Bengalis used all of those items in the seva. However, when donations were made to Shri Nathji, the Bengalis gathered that money and sent it to their own gurus in Vrindavan.

After Shri Mahaprabhuji appointed Krishnadas as the manager of Shri Nathji's temple, Krishnadas began traveling to the neighboring cities of Mathura and Agra to purchase food supplies and other items, which he also gave the Bengalis for Shri Nathji's seva.

There was one follower of Shri Mahaprabhuji named Avadhutadas who lived in Ading but wandered all around Vraj. He was a vessel of grace and an accomplished soul. In Shri Krishna's eternal Lila he is 'Ketini' from the Kumarika group of Gopis. When Shri Krishna appeared before the Kumarika Gopis in the Rasa Lila, and they beheld the form of their Beloved, those



Gopis closed their eyes and went into a deep meditation as if they were perfected yogis.

In this world, Avadhutadas was born into a Brahmin family. Once, when a drought fell upon Vraj, his father relocated the family to the East. When Avadhutadas was fifteen, he left his home and returned to Mathura, where he met Shri Mahaprabhuji and prayed, "Take me under your shelter."

Shri Mahaprabhuji told him, "Come with me to Govardhan. I will initiate you there, in front of Shri Nathji."

When they neared the temple, Shri Mahaprabhuji told Avadhutadas to bathe in the Govinda Lake. Afterwards Shri Acharyaji himself bathed and entered the temple. Shri Nathji had just been offered His lunch. After the offerings had been removed, Shri Mahaprabhuji called Avadhutadas into the temple and initiated him in front of Shri Nathji.

After his initiation, Avadhutadas requested of Shri Mahaprabhuji, "I wish to wander around Vraj while holding Shri Nathji in my heart." Shri Mahaprabhuji took some water in his hands and sprinkled it over Avadhutadas, giving him a divine body. From that moment, Avadhutadas was no longer obstructed by hunger, thirst, or any false identification with his physical body. He attained the state of 'manasi seva,' in which he remained mentally absorbed in the worship of Shri Krishna.

Afterwards, Shri Mahaprabhuji waved the midday Arati lights before Shri Nathji, and Avadhutadas established Shri Nathji's divine form within his heart, from head to toe. From that day, Avadhutadas always wandered around Vraj and remained totally absorbed in the bliss of Shri Nathji's divine form.

For many days the Bengalis continued to perform Shri Nathji's seva, while reallocating the funds to their own gurus. Then, one day Shri Nathji came to Avadhutadas and said, "Tell Krishnadas to remove the Bengalis from my



worship. I would like My seva to become more opulent. Also, when the Bengalis offer My food, they place next to Me a small goddess idol which they have hidden in their hair and snuck into the temple. Therefore I want them quickly removed from My seva."

Avadhutadas remembered the Lord's words, and one day he met Krishnadas near Ading along the road from Govardhan to Mathura. He asked Krishnadas, "Where are you going?"

"To Mathura, to get some supplies for Shri Nathji." Krishnadas replied.

Avadhutadas further inquired, "Who is performing Shri Nathji's seva these days?"

"The Bengalis."

Avadhutadas then confided to Krishnadas, "Shri Nathji desires to have the Bengalis removed from His seva, and you should carry out that wish. The Bengalis keep a goddess deity hidden in their hair. When they make offerings to Shri Nathji, they take that goddess and place her next to Shri Nathji. He does not like this at all. Quickly remove them from the seva. Shri Nathji gave me that command, and I have passed it on to you."

Krishnadas replied, "Shri Mahaprabhuji appointed the Bengalis, so I must get Shri Gusainji's permission before I can remove them."

Avadhutadas advised him, "Then you should go to Adel and get Shri Gusainji's permission. Do whatever you need to do in order to get this work done."

Instead of continuing to Mathura, Krishnadas turned back from Ading to Govardhan. He informed the Bengalis, "I am going to Adel to see Shri Gusainji. I have some work to do there." He then confided in the temple workers and local Vrajvasis, "Take care of things here in Shri Nathji's temple while I am gone." Krishnadas then bid farewell to Shri Nathji and took his leave.



Fifteen days later, Krishnadas reached Adel and bowed at Shri Gusainji's feet. The bhakti master immediately asked, "Why have you left Shri Nathji's seva and come here?"

"Shri Nathji wants His seva to be more opulent," Krishnadas explained. "Also, the Bengalis have been bringing a goddess idol into the temple and placing her next to Shri Nathji when lunch is offered. They also send all of Shri Nathji's offerings to their own gurus in Vrindavan. Now they don't listen to anyone. If they stay any longer, they will really start to quarrel with us. Therefore, with your permission, I will return and remove them from Shri Nathji's seva."

Shri Gusainji told Krishnadas, "Previously, my older brother Shri Gopinathji traveled to the East and gathered one hundred thousand rupees of donations for Shri Nathji. He first came here to Adel and reported the donations. Then he continued on to Nathdvara and used that money to make gold trays and bowls for Shri Nathji. After personally adorning and serving Shri Nathji, Shri Gopinathji returned to Adel. The Bengalis working in the temple then took the gold trays, bowls and money that had been offered to Shri Nathji and sent it all to their gurus in Vrindavan. I also heard about all this, but what could I do? Shri Acharyaji appointed them, so how can we dismiss them from the seva?"

Krishnadas explained, "Maharaj! It is Shri Nathji's wish that they be removed, so don't say you cannot do anything about it. I will do whatever it takes to remove them."

Shri Gusainji agreed, "The Bengalis should definitely be removed. If they remain for much longer, they will start fighting with us."

Krishnadas requested, "Please write two letters to Raja Todarmal and Raja Birbal."



Shri Gusainji then wrote letters to those two kings and close associates of Emperor Akbar. He wrote, "Krishnadas lives in Govardhan, so please do as he asks of you. I would like to remove the Bengalis from Shri Nathji's seva and replace them with new temple sevaks. Krishnadas is the manager of Shri Nathji's temple, so I support whatever he does."

Krishnadas bowed to Shri Gusainji and proceeded to Agra. When he showed Shri Gusainji's handwritten letters to Raja Todarmal and Raja Birbal, they said, "Tell us what you want us to do, and we will do it."

Krishnadas replied, "I will go back to Nathdvara now and remove the Bengalis. If their gurus from Vrindavan ever come to Emperor Akbar and complain, please set them straight."

The two kings told Krishnadas, "Go ahead and carry out whatever orders Shri Gusainji has given. We will ensure everything goes smoothly here."

Krishnadas left Agra, passing through Mathura on his way back to Nathdvara. In Govardhan, he came upon Avadhutadas in the road. He questioned Krishnadas, "Why have you taken so much time to carry out Shri Nathji's wishes?"

Krishnadas assured him, "I went and took Shri Gusainji's permission and am just now on my way to remove the Bengalis from Shri Nathji's seva." When he returned to the Govardhan Hill, Krishnadas set fire to the Bengalis' huts. At the time, the Bengalis were serving Shri Nathji. When they realized what was happening, they rushed out of the temple in a panic and tried to extinguish the fires in their huts.

Meanwhile, Krishnadas lined the Govardhan Hill with two hundred Vrajvasis and instructed them not to let the Bengalis back up the Hill and into the temple. He quickly



established some Brahmins in Shri Nathji's worship and asked all the temple sevaks and cooks to carefully continue with Shri Nathji's seva.

Krishnadas himself then stood at the bottom of the Govardhan Hill with a stick in his hand. After the Bengalis had extinguished the fires, they came back and started to climb up the Govardhan Hill to reenter the temple. Krishnadas called out, "You are no longer needed in Shri Nathji's seva. I have already established others, and they have begun serving Shri Nathji."

The Bengalis argued, "Shri Nathji is our deity, and we were appointed to do His worship by Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya." They began to fight, but Krishnadas chased them away. They fled to Mathura and complained to their gurus, Rupa and Sanatan Goswami, "That low caste Shudra, Krishnadas set fire to our huts and forced us out of Shri Nathji's seva."

Krishnadas also went to Mathura in a chariot with fifty armed Vrajvasis. He proceeded directly to Rupa and Sanatan Goswami. They angrily rebuked Krishnadas, "What do you think you are doing? Low-caste one! Why have you attacked these Brahmins? And what will you say when Emperor Akbar hears about this?"

Krishnadas replied, "I am a low-caste Shudra, but I do not make Brahmin disciples, unlike you, who are not even fire worshipping Brahmins. You are mere clerks, yet you have made disciples of these Brahmins and have them bowing at your feet. It is you who will be hard-pressed to find an answer for this behavior. I can easily explain what has happened here, so if you want, let's go to the Emperor right now. Then we will see for sure who can answer for themselves."

Rupa and Sanatan Goswami relented, "This is between you and them. We don't know anything about it."



The Bengalis were upset and later approached the local ruler of Mathura, to whom they pleaded, "Krishnadas has removed us from Shri Govardhan Nathji's seva. Please reinstate us there by any means possible."

When Krishnadas also arrived there, the Mathura ruler felt his intensity and stood up to greet him. After offering Krishnadas a seat next to himself, the ruler requested, "You are a powerful man and the head manager of Shri Nathji's temple. What is done is done. Now excuse the Bengalis' mistake and allow them to return to Shri Nathji's seva."

Krishnadas replied, "I will not reinstate them in Shri Nathji's worship. They no longer work for us, for they are only ready to fight. After their huts caught on fire, I would have built new huts for them, but why did they just drop the seva they were doing for Shri Nathji and run down the Hill to save their huts? That is why they are no longer qualified for Shri Nathji's seva. However, because you have asked me to reinstate them, I will write to Shri Gusainji and ask him what to do. I will follow Shri Gusainji's wishes."

Krishnadas then returned to Nathdvara, and the Bengalis moved back to Vrindavan. After some days, the Bengalis gathered together and went to Agra, where they began to slander Krishnadas before Emperor Akbar. The Emperor replied, "Who is this Krishnadas? He has thrown these Brahmins out of their worship! Call him here."

Then Raja Birbal and Raja Todarmal explained to the Emperor, "Shri Nathji belongs to Shri Gusainji. Earlier, he placed the Bengalis in Shri Nathji's seva and paid them for their services. Now he is the one who has removed them."

Akbar exclaimed, "These Bengalis are grumbling and telling a bunch of lies. They were hired workers, so



they have no say in the matter. Call Krishnadas here. We will find out if he feels like reinstating the Bengalis or not."

Emperor Akbar sent his men to the Govardhan Hill to summon Krishnadas to his court. Krishnadas had heard that they were coming and had gathered ten or twenty men to accompany him. Krishnadas climbed up on a chariot and they all proceeded to Agra, accompanied by the Emperor's men. First he met with Raja Birbal and Raja Todarmal, who advised him, "The Bengalis came and complained to the Emperor, and we explained the situation. Today we will state your case to the Emperor again, so stay here today."

Afterwards, the two rajas went before Akbar in his court and informed him, "Shri Nathji's temple manager, Krishnadas has arrived. Krishnadas does not want to keep the Bengalis in Shri Nathji's worship. He has already appointed new workers and removed the Bengalis."

Akbar replied, "Good, let him hire whomever he wants. Why are these Bengalis making false accusations? Remove them."

Raja Todarmal and Raja Birbal then went to the Bengalis and told them, "The Emperor's order is that you have been removed from Shri Nathji's seva. Therefore, now quietly return to Vrindavan. Understand that if you try to start a fight, you will be very sorry."

The Bengalis then returned to Vrindavan disappointed. Krishnadas bid farewell to the two kings and returned to the Govardhan Hill. He then called for two scribes and wrote a letter to Shri Gusainji in which he explained, "Your order has been accomplished. The Bengalis have been removed from Shri Nathji's temple. I have already answered to the Emperor, and he stands by you. The disturbance is over. The Bengalis made false complaints to the Emperor, and he dismissed them."



Therefore, please grace us by quickly returning to Shri Nathji's temple."

The two scribes then went to Shri Gusainji, and after the bhakti Master read the letter, he returned to Shri Nathji's temple. There he called Krishnadas in front of Shri Nathji and officially appointed him as temple manager by placing a shawl over his head. Shri Gusainji praised, "You have done a great seva; you alone were capable of removing the Bengalis. Therefore, I am placing you fully in charge of this temple. Even if I myself make a mistake, do not hesitate to tell me about it. All the temple servants are under your command and no one else's. You alone can do seva in such a way that Shri Nathji will act according to what you say. You are a blessed vessel of my father, Shri Mahaprabhuji's grace, and so whatever you choose to do will be good for everyone. Make Shri Nathji's seva with opulence and care."

Krishnadas then fully prostrated to Shri Gusainji and Shri Nathji and commenced his duties managing all the temple affairs. From that day, a special seat was established for Shri Nathji's temple manager to sit upon, and as per Shri Gusainji's order, Krishnadas was seated upon it.

When the Bengalis heard that Shri Gusainji had come to Vraj, they gathered together and went to him. They complained, "Shri Mahaprabhuji gave us Shri Nathji's seva, and then Krishnadas removed us. Establish us once again in Shri Nathji's seva."

Shri Gusainji replied, "You left Shri Nathji's seva when the temple was open and ran down the Hill. The fault is yours. Now it is Shri Nathji's wish that you no longer serve in His temple, so you will not be reinstated."

The Bengalis continued to plead, "If you don't allow us to perform the seva here, how will we eat? Before, we were very happy with the food we received every day after



serving Shri Nathji. Now please give us some other seva svarupa, another Krishna deity to worship, through which we can maintain our sustenance."

Shri Gusainji then gave them his older brother, Shri Gopinathji's seva svarupa, a Krishna deity called Shri Madan Mohanji. The Bengalis returned to Vrindavan and began worshiping Madan Mohanji.

Shri Gopinathji is considered to be Baldevji, the brother of Shri Krishna, who is the form of Maryada – scriptural law and rules. Therefore, Shri Gopinathji's seva svarupa, Madan Mohanji belongs to the devotional 'Path of Law,' or Maryada Marg. Shri Gusainji gave that svarupa to the Bengalis because they worshiped according to the lawful path of 'puja,' rather than the 'seva' worship of the Path of Grace. In doing so, Shri Gusainji put an end to the dispute.

Shri Gusainji then established Sanchora Brahmins from Gujarat in Shri Nathji's temple seva and placed Ramdas in charge of the worship.

Ramdas was a Sanchora Brahmin who lived in Gujarat. In the Lila he is Manorama, a sakhi of Shri Chandravali (Shri Gusainji's Lila form). Manorama has a sattoik bhava and carries out the wishes of Shri Chandravali.

In Shri Krishna's Lila, Shri Swaminiji's intimate sakhi Lalitaji is very clever in making lila arrangements. Therefore when Krishnadas, a great vessel of grace, appeared in this world from the lila form of Lalitaji, he skillfully arranged all of Shri Nathji's temple affairs. In the same way, when Ramdas appeared in this world from the lila form of the Gopi Manorama, he adorned and cooked for Shri Nathji and also took care of whatever Shri Gusainji needed done in the temple.

When he was twenty, Ramdas' parents died, and he went to have the darshan of Shri Ranchorji in Dwarka. It was



there that Ramdas first beheld Shri Mahaprabhuji. As he listened to Shri Mahaprabhuji speak, the knowledge dawned within him that, "Shri Acharyaji is the manifest form of the Lord Himself. By remaining in his shelter, I will become accomplished."

When the teachings were finished, Ramdas prostrated before Shri Mahaprabhuji and requested, "Maharaj, please accept me."

"Go bathe, and then return here," Shri Mahaprabhuji instructed. When Ramdas returned, Shri Mahaprabhuji initiated him and said, "Now make Shri Krishna's seva."

Ramdas replied, "My father has a Krishna deity. I will serve Him however you instruct me to."

Shri Mahaprabhuji gave Ramdas' Krishna a five-nectars bath, and Ramdas stayed with Shri Mahaprabhuji for some days, learning the ways of Shri Krishna's divine service. One day Ramdas mentioned, "Maharaj, I have not studied the scriptures at all, but I have a strong desire to read your writings."

As Shri Mahaprabhuji taught Ramdas from his own writings, Shri Krishna's Vraj lilas arose within Ramdas' heart. He then sang the following poem before Shri Mahaprabhuji:

O Sakhi! Let's go to the market of Vraj,
where Hari's nectar love is for sale!
It's damn cheap – the price is merely your life's breath!
That love is otherwise extremely hard to find
and cannot be purchased, even with so much gold.
But in Vraj, the ways of the heart are all reversed!

"O, Sakhi!" sings Ramdas:

"Krishna, a priceless Jewel,
can be found right here."

Ramdas pleased Shri Mahaprabhuji with this and many other nectar-filled poems. He later returned home and performed his Thakurji's seva for many days. One day a Vaishnava visited



him, and Ramdas lovingly hosted him and kept him in his home. Ramdas told that Vaishnava, "It is rare to have the association of a bhakta. You have blessed me greatly by coming to my home."

The Vaishnava replied, "There is one Vaishnava whose association would be worth your while. His name is Padmanabhdas."

"I would like to visit with this Padmanabhdas," Ramdas thought to himself. When that Vaishnava continued on his way four days later, Ramdas took his Thakurji and went straight to Kanoja to meet with Padmanabhdas. He lovingly kept Ramdas with him for an entire month, and they remained immersed in Krishna satsang.

Ramdas later mentioned to him, "I had heard your praises before, and now I have found it to be true – your association leads to great spiritual pleasure. Now I shall go to visit Shri Nathji and would like to leave my Thakurji with you." Padmanabhdas agreed and placed Ramdas' Thakurji next to the bed of his own Thakurji, Shri Mathureshji.²

Ramdas continued to Shri Nathji's temple in Gopalpur, where Shri Gusainji became very pleased with Ramdas and appointed him as Shri Nathji's head temple priest. Ramdas served Shri Nathji with heartfelt devotion for the remainder of his life. After Padmanabhdas left his body, Ramdas' Thakurji was sent to Shri Nathji's temple and from then on resided next to Shri Nathji.

From that time, Shri Gusainji increased the opulence of Shri Nathji's seva to a royal level. The food offerings were expanded, and many new sevaks were appointed to serve in the temple, including tailors, goldsmiths and other craftsmen. Shri Gusainji arranged for all of them to receive a certain ration of Shri Nathji's prasad daily. The temple manager was given his own special seat.

In this way, Shri Gusainji increased the grandeur of Shri Nathji's worship.³ He placed Krishnadas at the head



of all the sevaks, and all questions about the temple affairs were directed to him. When Shri Gusainji came to the temple, he would adorn Shri Nathji and quietly attend to His seva. If anyone asked him something, Shri Gusainji would say, "Go ask Krishnadas. I don't know anything about those matters."

Shri Gusainji maintained that practice, and Krishnadas' influence and command thereby increased. Wherever Krishnadas went, he rode a chariot and was accompanied by horses, bulls, camels and wagons, and fifty men. He became famous throughout the land. Krishnadas also composed new songs daily and sung them in front of Shri Nathji. He was a great bhakta and recipient of divine grace.

3. The Rasa Lila

One day, Shri Nathji told Krishnadas, "Tonight, after My evening Arati and seva are completed, bring Shyamkumhar with his drum and come to Parasoli by the Moon Lake. There, I will dance the Rasa Lila." Krishnadas bowed to Shri Nathji and proceeded down the Hill. In the meantime, Shri Nathji also told Shyamkumhar, "Bring your drum and go wherever Krishnadas tells you to."

In the Lila, Shyamkumhar is Visakhaji's sakhi, named Rasatarangini. She plays the pakhavaj drum. One time when Rasatarangini was sleeping, Visakhaji had the urge to sing and awoke her, saying, "Play the pakhavaj drum for me."

Visakhaji began singing to the accompaniment of Rasatarangini's drum, but Rasatarangini became lethargic and did not keep the proper beat. Visakhaji angrily questioned, "What is wrong with your drumming tonight?"



"I am sleepy, but you want to sing, so what can I do?" Rasatarangini answered.

Visakhaji then took the drum away from Rasatarangini and said, "You are not my sakhi. Now go take birth in the world! You spoke to me with false pride, so this is the consequence."

Rasatarangini then took birth as Shyamkumhar in a family of potters in the town of Mahavan. He was the brightest child in his community. Shri Gusainji called him to Gokul, initiated him, and placed him in the seva of Shri Navanita Priyaji. When the opulence of Shri Nathji's seva was increased, Krishnadas realized that Shri Nathji should also have a drummer. Shri Nathji then told Krishnadas, "In Gokul there is a talented pakhavaj drummer named Shyamkumhar. Tell Shri Gusainji to send him here for My seva."

Krishnadas then told Shri Gusainji, "Place Shyamkumhar in Shri Nathji's seva. It is the wish of the Lord Himself." Shri Gusainji sent Shyamkumhar from Gokul to the Govardhan Hill, and from that day forward, Shyamkumhar lived by the Govardhan Hill and played the drum for Shri Nathji.

Krishnadas called Shyamkumhar to him and said, "Tonight Shri Nathji wishes to dance the Rasa at Parasoli. Bring your drum, and we will go after Shayan Arati."

Shyamkumhar confirmed, "Shri Nathji gave me that same divine command. That is why I am already carrying my drum with me."

That evening, after Shri Nathji's Shayan Arati, the two bhaktas went directly to the Moon Lake by Parasoli, where they beheld Shri Nathji and His consort, Shri Swaminiji accompanied by many Gopis. There Shri Nathji told Shyamkumhar, "You play the drum, and tell Krishnadas to sing."

It was a divine evening on the full moon night of the spring month of Chaitra. The lovely beams of the Vraj



moon illuminated the scene, and beautiful flowers blossomed on all the vines. While Shri Nathji and Shri Swaminiji danced, Krishnadas sang,

*Radha, Brishabhana's daughter,
dances with Krishna, the Mountain Holder.⁴
Their bodies flow as the loving mood
of the Rasa Lila dance builds.
Ten beats join the seven notes and combine
to form the melody Kedaro.
The song fluctuates elegantly with a firm beat
and magnifies love.
They all find delight in this perfect love.
Filled with desire and many kinds of pleasure,
Their faces are full of expression.
The merriment of it all, their great fortune,
intensifies the love.
The splendid moon,
beholding hundreds of groups of women
in loving play with Lord Krishna, stops in its tracks.
Krishnadas praises the magnificent play
which instills deep love in the heart.*

Shri Nathji was so pleased with this poem that He gave Krishnadas the jasmine flower garland adorning His own neck. Recognizing his supreme fortune, Krishnadas became filled with bliss in every pore of his body. He continued to sing, immersed in the nectar mood:

*To swift and languid beats, Krishna
dances the Rasa like an acrobat.
'Tatathei, tatathei' sounds the drum,⁵
while deer-eyed Radha grins.*



*The moon is abashed by just hearing Them sing
and becomes enmeshed in the trap
of Krishna's eyebrow.
Breasts, belled belts and earrings quiver,
beads of sweat resplendently shimmer,
and anklets and sashes jingle.
Shri Radha is adorned in blue garments.
Now the dance moves into uneven time.
Their dance steps captivate the world.
Enchanter Krishna is delighted.
He flirts and dances elegantly and gives Krishnadas
the sweat-soaked garland
from around His own neck.*

Then Krishnadas sang,

*'Tatathei' sounds the drum in the Rasa circle,
as beloved Krishna dances
with His supreme beloved, Radha.
They sing together so beautifully.
Their tapered eyebrows arch and then flutter.
Radha sings in the Maalava raga,
skillfully controlling the beat.
With His beloved at His side, Shri Krishna,
the Lord of beauty, plays the flute.
Sings Krishnadas, "Krishna is a matchless beauty,
and of all the Gopis, the lovely young Radha
is His chosen One.
This fantastic divine Couple have revealed here on earth
the enchanting and nectar-filled art of loving play."*



Krishna's Inner Circle

Then he sang,

*Krishna is the Moon,
and the Gopis have become the stars,
as they converge in the Rasa Dance circle.
Krishna's beaming face illuminates Vrindavan
and affords the Vrindavan Gopis joy.
His delightful and enchanting lotus eyes
steal the Gokul dairymaids' hearts.
As the Lover and beloved dance,
the flowers in Their lotus hands begin to wilt.
Radha, a nectar expert, becomes steeped
in the elixir mood of this love-dance,
while Krishna is filled with the highest delight.
Krishnadas' Lord, the Mountain Holder,
is the Crown-prince and King of nectar connoisseurs.*

Krishnadas then sang,

*Radha is teaching Krishna how to play the flute.
She entwines Her arm over His shoulder,
places Her fingers over the seven holes,
and plays the Kanharo raga so sweetly,
with all the subtleties of the notes.
Her eyes, now filled with the loving mood,
begin to dance.
Krishnadas celebrates with a delighted heart
over the magnificence of Krishna and His Beloved.*

Krishnadas sang many such songs with the superb accompaniment of Shyamkumhar's drumming, while Shri Nathji and the Gopis danced nearby in the most astounding ways. Through the grace of Shri Mahaprabhuji, Shri Nathji truly blessed Krishnadas in this way. Later that evening,

Krishnadas



after Shri Nathji, Shri Swaminiji and all the other Gopis disappeared from their sight, Krishnadas and Shyamkumhar returned to Gopalpur. There, Krishnadas continued to regularly sing his poems in front of Shri Nathji.

4.

A Contest with Surdas

One day, Surdas told Krishnadas, "All of the poems you have composed are but shadows of my own."

"Now I will create a poem that does not resemble any of yours," retorted Krishnadas.

Krishnadas then sat down in a quiet place and determinedly tried to think of a subject which Surdas had not sung about; but he found that Surdas had already composed a poem about every single lila which came to his mind. The great Surdas had written poems on *Daan Lila*, in which Krishna demands a tax from the Gopis, *Maan lilas* in which a Gopi is annoyed in love with the blessed Lord, as well as poems in praise of Krishna's cows.

Krishnadas sat for three hours, lost in thought. Eventually he became discouraged, set his pen and paper down, and went to take his meals. Meanwhile, Shri Nathji arrived and wrote the following line on Krishnadas' paper:

*Krishna is coming back from the forest,
accompanied by His cowlads.
His curly locks are covered
with the dust of the Nachuki cows.*

After completing that line, Shri Nathji left. The *nachuki* cows which Shri Nathji mentioned in this poem are cows which have given birth for the first time. As they are particularly attentive towards their newborn calves and



always hover around them, the cowlads leave the nachuki cows in the cowpen instead of herding them in the forest with the other cows. In this poem, Krishna is returning from the forest, surrounded by an entire herd of nachuki cows, and His curly locks are covered with the dust that has risen from their hooves. Surdas had of course never described such an improbable scene.

After Shri Nathji wrote that one line, He got up left. When Krishnadas returned from blissfully enjoying mahaprasad, he found the line which Shri Nathji had created and then completed the poem himself with the following descriptions:

*Krishna is coming back from the forest,
accompanied by His cowlads.
His curly locks are covered
with the dust of the Nachuki cows.
His brow is bowed like the love god's –
His sidelong glances are the arrows.
His head is embellished with a delightful crown
of peacock feathers.
His exalted face appears splendid as the moon.
Gazing at Him, the delighted Gopis
blossom like fresh lotuses.
His lips are like the bimba fruit, and when He laughs,
His teeth appear like rows of jasmines.
Earrings encircling His ears, a ring in His nose
and tilak mark upon His brow.
The Kostubhamani jewel around Krishna's neck is
matched with three fine necklaces:
A gold jewel studded necklace and a pendant
hang upon His chest,
and between them shines a string of pearls.
Bangles adorn His wrists.*



*He wears arm bands on His long arms,
rings on His fingers, and jewels on His fingernails.
The sound of His flute enchants the entire world
and binds the Gopis' hearts into a knot of love.
Bells hang from a sash around His waist,
embedded with diamonds.
The lines of hair around His lotus navel
appear like rows of hovering black bees.
Beloved Krishna's playful stride
is for the benefit of His bhaktas.
Beads of sweat line His cheeks.
His graceful body is draped in a yellow cloth.
When He walks, the sound of His anklets is like a song.
Sings Krishnadas,
"The brilliance of Mountain Holder Krishna's toenails
removes all darkness from my heart."*

Having completed the poem, Krishnadas cheerfully went to see Surdas, smiling all the way. Surdas asked, "Today you have come here smiling and happy, so what new poem have you written?"

"Today, I have at last written a poem which does not resemble any of yours. It describes something which you have never sung about."

Surdas replied, "Go ahead and read it to me, I am listening."

After Krishnadas read only the first line, Surdas exclaimed, "I challenged you in a poetry contest, not your Lord! That first line is not yours. It is true that I have never sung about Nachuki cows, but Shri Nathji gave you the first line of that poem. And as far as the description of Shri Nathji's body which you used to complete this piece, I have sung thousands of such poems." Hearing Surdas words, Krishnadas was silenced.



A doubt arises from this account: not only is Krishnadas the Gopi Lalitaji, but Shri Nathji Himself took Krishnadas' side by writing the first line of the poem for him. So how could Krishnadas still not win the contest?

In the Lila, Krishnadas is the form of Lalita Sakhi and Surdas is Champalata Sakhi, but these two Gopis have different eligibilities. Lalita Sakhi's seva is more exalted in the Lila. Krishnadas' seva was also superior, for he managed all the temple sevaks, took care of the temple related items, and made sure the temple storerooms were always filled. He was truly very skilled in all these matters. But just as a goldsmith does not do the work of a tailor, and a tailor does not set jewels, everyone is gifted in the seva they are given. Shri Swaminiji and Shri Nathji love both Lalita and Champalata. Krishnadas lost the contest because in this world, he had a slight amount of pride about all the poems he had written and sung.

Krishnadas was such a vessel of his guru's grace.

5.

A Prostitute's Liberation

One day Krishnadas went to Agra in his chariot to purchase supplies for Shri Nathji's temple. When he arrived at the bazaar in Agra, Krishnadas noticed a prostitute teaching her beautiful twelve year old girl how to dance. The girl was an excellent dancer as well as a fine classical singer. When Krishnadas heard her singing, he was very pleased and stopped his chariot to listen. Then he saw the girl and became totally enchanted with her.

Here, the question arises: how did Krishnadas, who had received Shri Mahaprabhuji's grace, become attracted to the daughter of a prostitute? He was already enchanted by Shri



Krishna, so not even celestial nymphs and goddesses could have attracted him. Prostitutes and their musicians are lowly singers, and their songs are compared to sewer water that is unfit for drinking and bathing. Shri Mahaprabhuji explained the impurity associated with those types of singers in his teaching, Jalbheda: "Another category of singers are those who are intoxicated and associate with prostitutes. They are like stagnant water holes. Lowly singers who only recite for money are like sewer water."

Krishnadas, meanwhile, was a man of supreme wisdom, a protector of the laws of Dharma, so how could he be pleased with the singing of a prostitute's daughter? If anyone were to copy Krishnadas' actions, he or she would become turned away from Hari. Krishnadas appeared here to uplift and teach others by example, so how could he be so pleased by that girl?

In answer to this doubt, it must be understood that there was another reason behind all of this. The girl was a divine soul with connection to Shri Krishna's Lila, where she is a sakhi of Lalitaji, named Bahubhashini. One day, Lalitaji was making some preparations for Shri Krishna and told Bahubhashini, "Grind some sugar into a powder and bring it to me."

Bahubhashini took the bowl of sugar and left, but when she stopped to talk to another sakhi, some saliva fell from her mouth into the sugar. Bahubhashini did not notice what had happened and returned with the powdered sugar. The supremely clever Lalita Sakhi knew what had happened and told Bahubhashini, "Some spit fell from your mouth into this sugar and made it impure. But this too was destined to happen, for everything happens according to the Lord's wish."

Bahubhashini objected, "You are lying. Nothing fell from my mouth into the sugar. And besides, Shri Krishna eats the leftovers from all of His cowlad friends, so what is the difference?"

Lalita exclaimed, "What do you know of the Lord's lilas? He does whatever He pleases, but if you do something improper



because you feel like it, you will certainly fall. So now, you will take a low birth in the world."

Bahubhashini then countered, "Then you also take birth in a low-caste family and come uplift me. How could I leave you to go anywhere?" In this way, they cursed each other. Krishnadas was born into a low caste Shudra family and Bahubhashini was born to a prostitute, but she never even looked at a worldly man. Shri Nathji then inspired Krishnadas to go to Agra so that the girl could be uplifted into the devotional world. That is the real reason that Krishnadas became enchanted with her singing.

As Krishnadas stood there listening to the prostitute girl sing and watching her dance, he considered, "This is absolutely supreme! She is a divine soul and fit for Shri Nathji to accept." He gave the girl ten rupees and told her, "Come to my place tonight." He then proceeded to the Haveli where he always stayed in Agra and loaded his wagon with the items he needed from the market.

In the early evening, the prostitute came to Krishnadas, accompanied by her musical entourage, and began to dance and sing. Pleased with the performance, Krishnadas gave her one hundred rupees and told her, "Your beauty, dancing, and singing are all wonderful. In the morning I will return to the Govardhan Hill, where my wealthy Master lives. If you wish, accompany me."

The prostitute agreed, "I would like that very much." She was pleased with these events and thought to herself, "If he gave us this much money, just imagine what his rich patron will award me!" She then returned home and put all the items she needed for her performances into her cart.

In the morning she went to meet Krishnadas, and they began their journey. They spent the first night in



Mathura and reached Gopalpur on the following day at midday. Krishnadas had the prostitute's daughter bathe and gave her new clothes to wear. He decided, "I want Shri Nathji to hear her sing, so I will teach her one of my poems." He taught her a poem, saying, "Sing this composition in the Purvi raga."

*My heart is stuck to Krishna's beauty.
I'm engrossed in His handsome form,
bent in three places, dark as a rain-filled cloud –
my mind does not wander anywhere else.
Krishnadas offers his body, world, and head to the Lord.*

After Krishnadas finished teaching her the poem, Shri Nathji's afternoon Utthapan darshan had already closed. When the late afternoon Bhog darshan was about to open, Krishnadas brought the prostitute and her group up to the temple.

During the afternoon period of Utthapan, Shri Krishna has just been awakened in the forest bower, and hence, the food preparations are quickly offered. Afterwards, as Shri Krishna returns home along the paths of Vraj, He accepts all kinds of bhaktas along the way. That is why Krishnadas brought the prostitute before Shri Nathji during the Bhog darshan, so that He would accept her at that time.

When the temple doors opened for the Bhog darshan, the young prostitute first danced and then began to sing the poem Krishnadas had taught her. After singing the last line, "Krishnadas offers his body, world and head to the Lord," the girl left her body right there in the temple and attained a divine form in Shri Krishna's Lila. The girl's mother and the rest of her group began to weep, "We made our living from her. Now what will we do?"



Krishnadas took them all down to the bottom of the Govardhan Hill and consoled them, "What's done is done. Now what can anyone do? She had only so much time in this world. Now tell me how much money you need."

"One thousand rupees will sustain us for some time, and then whatever destiny provides, we will manage." Krishnadas then gave them one thousand rupees and bid them farewell. In this manner, Shri Nathji accepted the young prostitute through the intercession of Krishnadas.

Here another doubt arises: how did the girl attain the eternal Lila without connection to Shri Mahaprabhuji? The answer is that Shri Mahaprabhuji resided within Krishnadas' heart, and while Krishnadas seemed to be merely teaching her a poem, he was in fact establishing her connection with Shri Mahaprabhuji. The first line of the poem, "My heart is stuck to Krishna's beauty," revealed to her the entire devotional dharma and the way to apply one's heart and mind to the Lord.

Most people's hearts and minds are attached to that which they think is their own, such as their home, spouse, children, and body. Therefore, these are to be totally dedicated to the Lord. Only after dedicating everything and giving all sense of ownership over to the Lord can one truly say, "Shri Krishna alone is my refuge." So when the girl sang the first line of Krishnadas' poem, "My heart is stuck to Krishna's beauty," she left everything else. In this way, Shri Mahaprabhuji himself arranged for her divine connection through Krishnadas.

Still, one could question, "How could she attain the Lila without a guru?" One time Shri Nathji gave His darshan to the Muslim bhakta Alikhan and his daughter, but then He instructed them to become followers of Shri Gusainji, and they did. Why were they instructed to become Shri Gusainji's followers, whereas this prostitute girl was not? Shri Krishna



Himself promised Shri Vallabhacharya that, 'I will accept only those souls for whom you establish Brahma Sambandh.' Therefore, without the Brahma Sambandh connection given by Shri Mahaprabhuji or Shri Gusainji, how could that prostitute's daughter have attained the Lila? Without Brahma Sambandh, it is possible to attain liberation, but extremely difficult and rare to attain Shri Krishna's Lila.

Shri Vallabhacharya's own family lineage has extended for the purpose of giving the gift of connection to Shri Krishna through the Brahma Sambandha mantra. Shri Mahaprabhuji gave some of his followers permission to initiate others into the Path of Grace with the first initiation mantra, "Shri Krishna is my refuge," but not to give Brahma Sambandha. That initiation of sacred connection is possible only through Vallabhkul, the descendants of Shri Vallabhacharya. It will not be fruitful if taken from anyone else.

So how was that girl able to attain Shri Krishna's Lila after she left her body? Lalita Sakhi and Shri Swaminiji actually reside permanently in the Lila. Lalitaji took form in the world as Krishnadas and sent that prostitute's daughter back to the Lila, where she arranged for the girl's Brahma Sambandh through Shri Swaminiji. Lalitaji kept the girl engaged in seva to Shri Krishna, for she was Lalitaji's own sakhi. So the girl's Brahma Sambandh actually occurred in the Lila, in this divine fashion. It is similar to the time when Shri Gusainji arranged for the daughter of a man from Mathura to be given Brahma Sambandh in the Lila.

Krishnadas was such a great Vaishnava that he arranged for that prostitute's daughter to be accepted.



6.

Krishnadas enlightens the Vaishnavas

Once a group of Vaishnavas went to visit Kumbhandasji, who lovingly offered everyone a seat and said, "You have truly blessed me by coming here today. Tell me what I can do for you."

"We have come to hear something from you about the ways of the Path of Grace," they said.

Kumbhandas replied, "Krishnadas is very knowledgeable about this path, so you should ask him."

The Vaishnavas submitted, "It is beyond our capacity to ask Krishnadas such a question."

Kumbhandas suggested, "Come with me, and I will ask him on your behalf." Then they all left together to find Krishnadas.

The reason Kumbhandas did not reply directly to the Vaishnavas' question is that he was absorbed in the most intimate of Radha and Krishna's lilas, and in the state of love, who knows what he might have revealed? In his kirtans, Kumbhandasji was able to describe Shri Krishna's lilas in a very esoteric manner, so that they can only be understood according to the level of the listener's eligibility. If he had begun explaining anything to those Vaishnavas, he would have had to clearly explain it all. Hence he decided to take them to Krishnadas instead.

Krishnadas was very pleased to see these Vaishnavas arrive and after properly greeting them, sang the following poem:

*Know that Krishna has made a soul His own
when one is dedicated to serving other bhaktas
and craves the dust of the bhaktas' feet.*



*Their mind and actions lie with the bhaktas,
and they consider Hari and His bhaktas as one.
Krishnadas' speech, heart and action remain
with those who keep Hari in their hearts.*

After singing that poem, Krishnadas said, "All you great Vaishnavas have blessed me by coming here. Now tell me whatever it is I can do to please you."

Kumbhandas replied, "All these Vaishnavas want to hear about the ways of the Path of Grace. Grace them with an explanation of what should they say and remember in order to have true experience of the Path of Grace."

Krishnadas exclaimed, "Kumbhandasji! You have every qualification fitting to a blessed vessel of Shri Mahaprabhuji's grace. You are also my elder, so what can I say before you?"

Kumbhandas insisted, "It is my wish that you tell them. You are the head of all the sevaks in Shri Nathji's temple and in charge of their duties. You are the manager of the Pushti Marg, so you tell them."

Krishnadas then sang a poem about the refuge mantra, the first initiation into the Path of Grace.

*Speak, 'Krishna, Shri Krishna is my refuge.'
Day and night, daily, every moment,
every hour, repeat it.
It removes all sins for fallen souls.
It invokes constant love for the Lord of Vraj.
Then, without effort you can cross
the fathomless worldly ocean.
The heart will remain filled with bliss day and night
and hold the essence of all Krishna's grace-filled Lilas.
Lakshmi, Brahma, Shiva, Sanaka, Shuka,
Sharada, Vyasa and Narada never stop chanting it.*



*Shri Nathji's glory shines infinitely.
While the Vedas go on saying, 'Not this and not that,'
Krishnadas takes His shelter.*

After singing that poem about the Ashtakshara mantra of refuge in Krishna, Krishnadas proceeded to sing a poem about the Panchakshara mantra of Brahma Sambandh.⁶

Krishna, O Krishna!

*He knows the inner movements of my soul.
Consider your body, senses, breath, spouse, home,
wealth, soul and everything to be Krishna's.*

'Krishna is my master; I am His servant' –

Hold this in your heart throughout

all thoughts, speech, and actions.

Krishnadas' Lord is Krishna, the Mountain Holder.

*May my heart be merged in the dust
of Shri Vallabh's feet.*

After hearing those two songs, the Vaishnavas were very happy and praised him, "Krishnadasji, you are full of fortune. In just two poems you have removed all of our doubts and revealed to us the principles of the Path." The Vaishnavas bid Krishnadas farewell and returned to their homes.

Krishnadas was a blessed vessel of devotion and a true bhakta.

7.

Shri Gusainji's Separation

Krishnadas had great loving affection towards a woman named Gangabai Kshatrani.



In the Lila, Gangabai is a *tamas bhakta* in the Shruti group of Gopis. She was born in Mathura in the home of a Kshatri and married at the age of eleven to a local Kshatri boy. She gave birth to nine sons, all of whom died, and then one daughter. Her daughter was married with 100,000 rupees worth of jewelry but died soon after. The girl's husband then kept all the jewelry after bribing the local ruler with some of the jewels.

When Gangabai was fifty-five, she came to live in Nathdvara (Gopalpur) by the Govardhan Hill to get away from the conflict in Mathura. After meeting Krishnadas, she expressed her desire to become Shri Acharyaji's disciple. Krishnadas approached Shri Mahaprabhuji and requested, "Please accept Gangabai as your follower."

Shri Mahaprabhuji replied, "She is a divine soul, but her heart is not yet set on Shri Thakurji."

Krishnadas prayed, "Through your grace, Shri Nathji will bless her." Later, because of Krishnadas' insistence, Shri Mahaprabhuji did give Gangabai the first initiation.

Whenever Krishnadas traveled outside of Vraj to collect offerings for Shri Nathji's temple, Gangabai would return to Mathura. When he returned, she would again take all her things and come back to the Govardhan Hill. In order to keep her mind and heart focused on the devotional dharma, Krishnadas would send Gangabai mahaprasad from Shri Nathji's temple twice a day. He did so because he knew that she was fond of eating, and the preparations offered to Shri Nathji were exquisitely prepared. He would also explain to her about the devotional lifestyle, the Bhagavad dharma. He then arranged for her to have all of Shri Nathji's darshans in the temple. Through her association with Krishnadas, Gangabai's heart and mind turned spiritual.

Once, while Shri Gusainji was serving Shri Nathji lunch, Gangabai happened to glance at the offerings,⁷ so Shri Nathji did not accept them. After some time, Shri



Gusainji removed the offerings, waved the midday Rajbhog Arafti lights, closed the temple for the afternoon and descended the Govardhan Hill to his nearby home. After Shri Gusainji had taken mahaprasad and gone to rest, all of the temple sevaks and cooks also took prasad.

Shri Nathji then went to Ramdas, the head priest, who was sleeping, and poked him with His stick. When Ramdas awoke and saw Shri Nathji, he immediately bowed and then stood up with his hands respectfully joined together.

"I am still hungry," Shri Nathji said to Ramdas.

"Maharaj!" Ramdas exclaimed, "Shri Gusainji has already offered You lunch today. Why are You still hungry?"

"I did not accept those offerings, because Gangabai looked at them first."

Ramdas went directly to where Shri Gusainji was sleeping and awoke him by gently massaging his feet. He informed Shri Gusainji, "Shri Nathji is hungry! Gangabai saw the Rajbhog offerings before they were placed before Shri Nathji, so He did not get to enjoy anything for lunch."

Shri Gusainji immediately arose, bathed and entered the temple. Ramdasji also bathed, and by that time the cooks also arrived. As it was the cold season, Shri Gusainji told the cooks, "Badibhat [rice with fried mung-bean dumplings] can be prepared quickly, so make some right away."

As soon as the *badibhat* was ready, Shri Gusainji offered it to Shri Nathji. Meanwhile, all the midday Rajbhog offerings were prepared for the second time, and when it was all ready, Shri Gusainji offered Shri Nathji both His lunch and dinner offerings [Rajbhog and Shayanbhog] together.



After finishing the evening seva and putting Shri Nathji to rest, Shri Gusainji took a bowl of the *badibhat* mahaprasad with him and descended the Hill. With his own hand, he gave a small bit of that prasad to all of his disciples and then took some himself. When Shri Gusainji began to praise the exceptional taste of the *badibhat*, Ramdas and the other temple sevaks agreed, "We have made this offering so many times this winter, but it has never tasted so good."

Shri Gusainji explained, "Shri Nathji was hungry, so He lovingly partook of the offering. That is why it tastes so delicious."

Krishnadas, who was standing nearby, sarcastically mentioned, "Maharaj! You yourself were the instigator and the enjoyer of this offering, so how could it not taste great?"

Shri Gusainji replied, "We are suffering the results of your enjoyment."

A doubt arises here. How could Shri Nathji not have partaken of the offerings that day, when Shri Gusainji himself removed the offerings, did achaman and mukhvastra [using water and a handkerchief to wash Shri Krishna's hands and mouth], and then gave Shri Nathji betel nut? If He was still hungry, wouldn't Shri Gusainji have known? Wouldn't Shri Nathji have told Shri Gusainji when he offered the betel nut, "I am still hungry"? What is the reason for this? Why did Shri Nathji instead go to Ramdas Bhitiriya to tell him that He was hungry?

The real reason Shri Nathji did not partake of the offering was that on that very day, Shri Gusainji's eldest son and daughter, Shri Girdharji and Shobha Betiji, had prepared badibhat in Gokul, while considering in their hearts, "Today, let's invite Shri Nathji here for lunch and offer Him something new to enjoy!"



Shri Nathji, in His form as the 'Liberator of the bhaktas,' then left the Govardhan Hill and came to Gokul to enjoy their offerings, thereby fulfilling Shri Girdharji and Shobha Betiji's divine desires and giving the bhaktas of Gokul a divine experience. After partaking of the badibhat in Gokul, Shri Nathji returned to the Govardhan Hill.

Meanwhile, all of the sevaks there had already taken prasad, and Shri Gusainji had gone to rest. When Shri Nathji returned to the temple, Shri Swaminiji asked Him, "Where did You just come from?"

Shri Nathji explained, "Shri Girdharji and Shri Shobha Betiji prepared badibhat for Me in Gokul. I have just returned after enjoying their offerings."

When she heard this, Shri Swaminiji thought, 'I would also like to enjoy badibhat, but Rajbhog is already finished here.' She told Shri Nathji, "Go wake up Ramdas and tell him, 'Gangabai Kshatrani looked at My lunch today before it was offered.'"

One might question why all of these events took place. In fact, it was all in order to bring to fruition an exchange which occurred among the members of Krishna's eternal Lila. These events were to lead to Shri Gusainji's six month separation from Shri Nathji. This is what happened:

Once in the Lila, Shri Krishna told Lalita Sakhi (Krishnadas' Lila form), "I am coming to your forest bower." When Chandravaliji (Shri Gusainji's Lila form) overheard that, she prevented Krishna from visiting Lalita Sakhi for six months by pleasing and serving Him herself in various clever ways. Lalita Sakhi experienced supreme separation during that time and became very thin.

Eventually Shri Swaminiji heard about this situation. She immediately brought Lalita Sakhi to Shri Krishna and told Him, "You have given my beloved Lalita Sakhi six months of separation. Now You must remain under her control for six



months. And whoever has caused Lalita Sakhi this suffering will also suffer six months of separation without even having your darshan during that time."

After hearing Shri Swaminiji's words, Shri Krishna remained silent. Later, another sakhi reported to Shri Chandravaliji what had been said. Chandravaliji responded, "Shri Swaminiji is even greater than Shri Krishna, so I cannot say anything to Her. But what Lalita Sakhi did to me was incorrect. Lalita Sakhi is Shri Swaminiji's sakhi, but she is equally my own sakhi. Now, because of her I have been cursed with six months of separation without Shri Krishna's darshan? By doing this, Lalitaji has actually acted against Shri Swamini."

How is this so? Shri Swaminiji appeared from Shri Krishna. From Shri Swaminiji's moonlike face appeared Shri Chandravaliji, and from Chandravaliji, all the other sakhis appeared. Shri Chandravaliji resides by Shri Krishna's left side and is supreme among all the sakhis.

Shri Chandravaliji said, "By orchestrating all of this, Lalitaji has also insulted Shri Swaminiji. Now Lalitaji will take birth in the world, experience a sudden death, and be reborn as a ghost! No one, not even Shri Krishna or Shri Swaminiji, will be able to save her from that ghost birth. She will have to suffer this consequence for causing me to be cursed."

When a sakhi reported all of this to Lalitaji, she began to shake with fear. She immediately ran to Shri Swaminiji and fell at Her feet. Shri Swaminiji then called for Shri Krishna and told Him, "Lalita Sakhi has fallen from our hands. Now do something to remedy this situation."

Then Shri Thakurji took Shri Swaminiji, Lalita Sakhi, and the rest of their group of sakhis to Chandravaliji's forest bower. When they arrived, Chandravaliji immediately stood up and paid her respects to Shri Krishna and Shri Swaminiji, sat them on an elevated seat, and lovingly honored Them. After offering Them lovely items to eat and then betel nut,



Chandravaliji stood attentively by Their side, her hands folded in respect.

Very pleased with her loving service, Shri Swaminiji and Shri Krishna took hold of Chandravaliji's hand and sat her down close to Them. Shri Swaminiji began, "Listen, Chandravali! Your love is exceedingly divine, and truly there is no difference between us. As Lalita is my sakhi, so she is yours as well. Now please do something to free her from the curse you have given her."

Chandravaliji replied, "Lalitaji is truly one of our own. Therefore, what happened here was for the sake of manifesting lila in the world. When Lalita Sakhi becomes a ghost, I myself will liberate her. This is my promise."

Lalita Sakhi fell at Chandravaliji's feet and said, "This is my just reward for offending you."

Shri Swaminiji then spoke, "Our group and this entire Lila creation will all manifest in the world around the Govardhan Hill during the Kali Yuga, and that is why these events have transpired." Shri Krishna, Lalitaji, Chandravaliji, and the other sakhis were delighted to hear Shri Swaminiji's words.

Among the members of the eternal Lila, there is pure spiritual love, and even their curses and jealousy are divine. Nothing in the Lila or even in this world is comprised of maya (illusion). These curses and jealousy were merely a divine excuse to manifest Hari's glory in the world, so that souls in the world could find Him by singing the praises of His lilas. Understand that in the world, curses and jealousy are negative and offensive, while in the Lila creation, all actions are purely spiritual.

In this way, according to the wish of Shri Swaminiji, Shri Thakurji appeared within the Govardhan Hill as Shri Nathji. Shri Swaminiji appeared as Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya and revealed Shri Nathji's divine form. Then, just as Chandravaliji appears from Shri Swaminiji in the Lila, in this world Shri Gusainji took birth as Shri Mahaprabhuji's son.



Lalitaji appeared as Krishnadas and became the manager of Shri Nathji's temple.

Shri Govardhandhar, Holder of the Govardhan Hill (Shri Nathji) has many forms, but two are steadfast. One is the form which Shri Mahaprabhuji established in the temple on the Govardhan Hill. The second, His Bhaktodharak svarupa, appears before the bhaktas to uplift them and give them joy. In that divine form, Shri Nathji played together with Govinda Swami and Kumbhandas and likewise appears wherever there are pure bhaktas, giving them direct experience of His divine being.

Although Gangabai looked at the food which Shri Gusainji was about to offer to Shri Nathji, it was in fact accepted. Otherwise, wouldn't all the sevaks have suffered spiritually from partaking of unaccepted offerings? Therefore, the svarupa which Shri Mahaprabhuji established in the temple [the first of His two forms described above] accepted and enjoyed those offerings in the temple, while His Bhaktodharak svarupa left the Govardhan Hill and went to Gokul to enjoy the badibhat which Shri Girdharji and Shobha Betiji had prepared.

Shri Swaminiji also knew that Shri Gusainji was due to experience six months of separation from Shri Nathji. Therefore, when She asked Shri Nathji to go wake Ramdas, She specifically told Him to mention Gangabai Kshatrani's name. She knew that Gangabai and Krishnadas loved each other, and that if Shri Gusainji mentioned her name or criticized Krishnadas, then he would be insulted. Krishnadas becoming upset would then lead to Shri Gusainji's six months of separation. That is why She told Shri Nathji, "Go and tell Ramdas that You are still hungry."

Ramdas was not aware of these background events, but when he went to Shri Gusainji and reported what Shri Nathji had said, Shri Gusainji understood, "Gangabai saw the offerings. Now it is clear that Shri Nathji wishes to bring to fruition the events which transpired between Krishnadas and me in the Lila.



It is inevitable. Now I should lovingly perform whatever seva I can for Shri Nathji, because soon it will be difficult for me to attain."

With that in mind, Shri Gusainji immediately bathed and proceeded to the temple. Shri Nathji had just returned from enjoying badibhat in Gokul, but as He had not yet enjoyed badibhat in His Nathdvara temple, Shri Gusainji decided to quickly prepare and offer that very dish. Later that evening, Shri Nathji's dinner and a second lunch were offered together, and then Shri Gusainji waved the evening Arati lights before Shri Nathji and concluded His seva.

Considering in his heart that, "Now it will be rare to see Shri Nathji and enjoy His prasad," Shri Gusainji then put some badibhat into a clay pot, descended the Govardhan Hill, and gave small portions of it to everyone. Then he tasted it himself and praised its great taste. By the wish of the Lord, Krishnadas then sarcastically jeered, "Why shouldn't it taste good? After all, you made it and you yourself offered it to Shri Nathji." What he really meant by that was, 'Without asking me, you went ahead and had this special dish prepared and then offered it to Shri Nathji. Therefore the good fortune is truly yours.'

It was then that Shri Gusainji responded, "Actually, we are suffering the results of your enjoyment!" With those words, Shri Gusainji revealed two meanings. First, 'It is because you love Gangabai and allowed her to sit in the inner area of the temple that her gaze fell on Shri Nathji's offerings. That was your doing. If not for you, how could she have been in that position?' Secondly, 'In the Lila, as Lalita Sakhi, you caused Shri Swaminiji to curse me. Therefore, I am experiencing the result of your actions alone.'

Shri Gusainji also revealed in those words that, 'I now realize that your good fortune has begun. Whatever you do now, you will reap the results. Actually, you already know in your heart what to do, because of what happened in the Lila.'



Krishnadas was very irritated after hearing Shri Gusainji's accusation and thought to himself, 'How can I stop Shri Gusainji from seeing Shri Nathji?' He went to Shri Purushottamji, the son of Shri Gusainji's older brother, Shri Gopinathji, and said, "You are the son of Shri Acharyaji's eldest son. Why are you sitting idly by, when you could be doing Shri Nathji's seva? Shri Gusainji has put all of his own orders in place, but you are the real head of the lineage by birth."

Purushottamji replied, "I don't have the power to remove Shri Gusainji from Shri Nathji's seva."

"Come with me to the temple," said Krishnadas. "I will arrange everything." That afternoon, half an hour before the Utthapan darshan, Shri Purushottamji bathed and entered the temple, while Krishnadas sat by Dandavati Sheela at the bottom of the Govardhan Hill.

Meanwhile, Shri Gusainji bathed and proceeded towards the temple. At Dandavati Sheela, he met Krishnadas, who said, "Purushottamji has bathed and entered the temple to perform Shri Nathji's seva. He is the real head of the lineage, so when he calls for you, you can come. Until then, you cannot climb the Hill, nor will you have Shri Nathji's darshan."

Shri Gusainji then bowed to Shri Nathji's flag and, recalling the Lila incident which led to all this, proceeded to Parasoli by the Moon Lake. He remained there and began to experience divine separation from Shri Nathji.

The reason Shri Gusainji did not return to Gokul at this time to be with Shri Navanita Priyaji is that Shri Swaminiji had declared in the Lila, "Shri Chandravaliji [Shri Gusainji] will experience six months of separation from Shri Thakurji and Me." If Shri Gusainji were to return to Gokul to be with Shri Krishna, then who knows when those six months of separation



would arise? Knowing that it would be difficult to meet with Shri Nathji for the next six months, Shri Gusainji proceeded to Parasoli to sit and wait.

Inside Shri Nathji's temple, there was a window facing east towards Parasoli. Whenever Krishnadas left the temple, Shri Nathji would go sit by the window and give Shri Gusainji darshan from there. Shri Gusainji passed his entire day gazing at that window.

One day Krishnadas was in the town of Anyor and saw Shri Nathji sitting in the temple window. The next morning, Krishnadas had the window sealed with cement and told Shri Nathji, "I have banned Shri Gusainji from having Your darshan, so why were You sitting by the window looking towards him? Do not go to Parasoli to see him either." Krishnadas did not even let Shri Nathji go in the direction of Parasoli to play.

While Shri Gusainji sat biding his time at Parasoli, he daily wrote secret notes called *Vigyapti* to Shri Nathji.⁸ Every day after midday Rajbhog, Ramdas Bhitirya, the head temple priest, went from the temple to Parasoli to give Shri Gusainji water that had touched Shri Nathji's feet. Shri Gusainji would then give Ramdas a flower garland in which he had concealed a piece of paper with a line of the *Vigyapti*.

When the temple priest Ramdas returned to the temple and adorned Shri Nathji with that garland, Shri Nathji would remove the paper and read the Sanskrit verses Shri Gusainji had written Him. Shri Nathji replied to each of Shri Gusainji's *Vigyapti* notes by writing on a betel leaf, using the chewed betel nut from His mouth as ink. He would give the leaf to Ramdas, who then carried it to Shri Gusainji every day after Rajbhog.



After reading Shri Nathji's betel-leaf note, Shri Gusainji would drop it in a glass of water and drink it. That is why the notes which Shri Nathji wrote to Shri Gusainji were never revealed to the world. However, after Shri Nathji read each of Shri Gusainji's notes, He would give it to Ramdas, so Shri Gusainji's *Vigyapti* has been revealed.

One day, suffering from intense separation, Shri Gusainji wrote to Shri Nathji:

*Lord, without Your sight
Your bhaktas' lives are useless,
Like a young newlywed girl
without her husband.*

After Shri Nathji read Shri Gusainji's lines, He wrote him a note explaining,

*It is the nature of a cloud to shower rain
when the proper time comes.
This is a well-known fact in the world.
You and I both know that when Krishnadas' time is up,
our reunion will occur.
Now persevere, and let the proper time arise.
Why suffer such separation?*

Ramdas took that note to Shri Gusainji, who replied to Shri Nathji in his next *Vigyapti*,

*True, the cloud releases its rain in due time,
but without a doubt, the anguished Chataka bird⁹
still cries for its water.*



Krishna's Inner Circle

With these words Shri Gusainji explained that, 'It is the nature of the cloud to rain only when the time comes, but the Chatak bird still loves the raincloud. Similarly, union with Krishna comes when the time is right, but bhaktas continually yearn for Him and will not be content with anything else. Only when You wish it so, Lord, will the time arise, but I cannot persevere without You. The dharma of the bhakta is to always yearn for the Lord, like the Chataka bird longs for its cherished rain.'

In this way, Ramdas daily visited Shri Gusainji and carried his notes and garlands to Shri Nathji. Shri Gusainji's other followers and temple sevaks also came to see him. Krishnadas knew about it, but he could not say anything to Shri Gusainji's followers. He did, however, reprimand Ramdas, "I know that you take letters back and forth between Shri Nathji and Shri Gusainji, and I don't approve of it."

Ramdas firmly replied, "I will continue to go see Shri Gusainji. You can keep me in Shri Nathji's seva if you wish, or if not, dismiss me."

Krishnadas was silenced by this reply, for where would he ever find such an excellent sevak to replace Ramdasji? Therefore he said nothing further to Ramdas.

For six months, from Paush Sudi 6 to Ashaad Sudi 5 [roughly December to May] Shri Gusainji remained by the Moon Lake at Parasoli. On the last day, after six months had passed, Raja Birbal happened to go to Shri Gusainji's home in Gokul. Shri Gusainji was still in Parasoli at the time, but his son, Shri Girdharji was home. Raja Birbal prostrated to Shri Girdharji and inquired, "Where is your father, Shri Gusainji? It has been many days since I have seen him."

Shri Girdharji explained to Raja Birbal, "Shri Gusainji has been staying at the Moon Lake by Parasoli



Krishnadas

ever since Krishnadas banned him from Shri Nathji's darshan. For six months he has suffered greatly in separation from the blessed Lord."

Raja Birbal immediately declared, "I will remove Krishnadas from his position in Shri Nathji's temple immediately!" He proceeded to his fort in Mathura and ordered 500 of his soldiers, "Go to the Govardhan Hill and arrest Krishnadas."

The soldiers arrested Krishnadas that evening and escorted him back to Mathura. Late that night, Raja Birbal sent a messenger to Gokul to inform Shri Girdharji, "I arrested Krishnadas and had him thrown in jail. Now take Shri Gusainji back to Shri Nathji's temple."

When Shri Girdharji received this news, he immediately mounted his horse and galloped towards Chandra Sarovar, the Moon Lake. When he arrived the next morning, he greeted his father, "Come with me and return to the Govardhan Hill and Shri Nathji's seva."

Shri Gusainji replied, "I will only do so with Krishnadas' permission."

Shri Girdharji then explained, "Krishnadas has been arrested and is being held in jail at Mathura."

Shri Gusainji was dismayed, "Shri Mahaprabhuji's blessed disciple Krishnadas is experiencing such suffering and hardship! You must have told Raja Birbal to arrest Krishnadas?"

"No," Shri Girdharji answered, "I just happened to mention that Krishnadas had banned you from seeing Shri Nathji. That is all I said."

"I will not eat anything until Krishnadas is brought here," Shri Gusainji declared.

Shri Girdharji again mounted his horse and raced off to Mathura, where he told Raja Birbal, "Shri Gusainji will not eat anything until Krishnadas comes to him. Free him now."



Raja Birbal summoned Krishnadas and warned him, "Look! Even after what you have done, Shri Gusainji has showered his grace upon you. He is fasting for your release. That is the only reason I am letting you go, but if you ever cause Shri Gusainji trouble again, I will never release you." With those words, Raja Birbal discharged Krishnadas into Shri Girdharji's custody, and Shri Girdharji quickly took him to Parasoli.

When Shri Gusainji saw them coming, he respectfully stood up, in recognition of Krishnadas as Shri Nathji's temple manager. Krishnadas humbly prostrated before Shri Gusainji, touched his feet, and sang the following poem:

*I bow my head to those who love the dust
of the feet of Shri Vallabh's son.
It makes no difference to me
if someone has a high position.
Association with those who suffer the confusion that
Shri Gusainji and Shri Krishna are not one and the same
is like poisonous venom to me.
Even the wise should never forget this.
Shri Gusainji reveals from the Vedic passages
what is essence and what is not.
Then he naturally extracts the devotional butter
in the form of Shri Krishna's appearance.
I have seen his greatness with these eyes.
He is like a flint stone which,
even when covered with water, does not lose its spark.
Krishnadas was once divine but became demonical.
Now he has been transformed again from devil to divine
by touching Shri Gusainji's feet.*



Shri Gusainji was very pleased with his poem. Krishnadas submitted, "Maharaj! Forgive my offense, and please return to Shri Nathji's seva."

"Now that you have given me permission, I will come back to the temple," Shri Gusainji replied. They proceeded together to Shri Nathji's temple, where Shri Gusainji prostrated before Shri Nathji and adorned Him in a rose-colored cotton garment and turban.¹⁰ The date was Ashaad Sudi 7, [usually in the month of May] and Shri Gusainji remained in Shri Nathji's seva for the entire day. After waving the evening Arati lights, Shri Gusainji brought Krishnadas before Shri Nathji and placed a shawl over his head, saying, "Continue to manage the temple affairs. You are very blessed." Krishnadas then sang,

*The son of Vallabh is supremely compassionate.
He blesses his own souls
by placing his hand upon their heads.
Those who come to his shelter,
according to the ways of grace,
are entrusted to Shri Govardhan Nathji.
He is extremely generous, a wise wishing stone
who takes us out of the worldly flow
and into his association.
Krishnadas praises, "Everything is accomplished
simply by knowing Shri Gusainji."¹¹*

After singing that poem, Krishnadas again prayed to Shri Gusainji, "Forgive me for the sin I have committed."

Shri Gusainji replied, "Shri Nathji will forgive you."

Shri Gusainji then closed the temple for the evening and greeted all the delighted Vaishnavas and sevaks. From that day, Shri Gusainji continued to perform Shri Nathji's ornamentation and other daily seva as before, and as per



his wish, Krishnadas remained temple manager. Krishnadas was such a vessel of grace and intimate devotee.

8.

Krishnadas travels to Vrindavan

Another time Krishnadas came to Gokul while Shri Gusainji was staying there. Shri Gusainji stood up to greet Krishnadas, respecting him as Shri Nathji's temple manager. He happily greeted Krishnadas and offered him a seat next to himself. After asking about Shri Nathji's welfare, Shri Gusainji offered Krishnadas a plate of Shri Navanita Priyaji's prasad with his own hand. That evening, Krishnadas was given another meal of mahaprasad and a comfortable bed to sleep in for the night.

The following morning, Krishnadas got ready to leave and said to Shri Gusainji, "I really want to see Vrindavan."

Shri Gusainji replied, "Okay, go ahead, but you will encounter difficulty."

Krishnadas walked to the nearby Yamuna River and then, disregarding Shri Gusainji's opinion, set out alone in his chariot for Vrindavan. He arrived in Vrindavan at midday, and all the Vrindavan saints and sadhus came to greet him. Krishnadas suddenly came down with a fever and told them, "I am very thirsty, and my throat is becoming dry."

"Quickly bring some water," the Vrindavan saints said.

"If there are any Vallabhi Vaishnavas [followers of Shri Vallabhacharya] from Gokul here, ask them to bring me some water. I will only drink the water which they bring."

The Vrindavan saints discussed amongst themselves and then replied, "We know of only one such Vaishnava.



He is a low-caste sweeper from Gokul who married into a family here in Vrindavan. If you wish, we can call him here."

Krishnadas replied, "The sweeper from Gokul would be best of all. Tell him to get a new vessel from the potter and after bathing in the Yamuna River, fill that vessel with water and bring it here."

When the sweeper was apprised of Krishnadas' plight and his request, he ran to Gokul. Shri Gusainji had just waved the midday Arati lights before Shri Navanita Priyaji and was standing at the steps to the Yamuna River, about to depart for the Govardhan Hill. The sweeper approached and, covering his mouth with a cloth, said, "Maharaj! Krishnadas is in Vrindavan with a fever and is very thirsty. He asked me for some water, so I have run here from Vrindavan."

Shri Gusainji asked his attendant for some water that had been offered to Shri Navanita Priyaji in the temple. Taking that water, Shri Gusainji mounted his horse and galloped off to Vrindavan, where he found Krishnadas. Shri Gusainji climbed up onto Krishnadas' chariot and poured the blessed water into Krishnadas' mouth. Krishnadas regained consciousness, bowed to Shri Gusainji, and sang,

*I celebrate over Shri Gusainji's feet.
You have mercifully journeyed here
to uplift me, a fallen soul.
Your splendorous crimson toenails,
filled with beauty and compassion like a fresh moon,
remove the anguish of separation.
By serving them, one finds bliss and magnificence.
Your lovely toes grant your followers joy.
They are cooling, soft and fragrant.*



*By their mere touch, the threefold pain ceases.
Says Krishnadas, "What can that enemy,
all-destroying time do to one
who remembers you even once?"*

After singing that poem, Krishnadas submitted, "Maharaj! I have met with such hardship because I did not follow your advice." They later returned together to the Govardhan Hill. That evening, while Shri Gusainji waved the evening Arati lights before Shri Nathji, Krishnadas sang,

*O friend, this day is indeed blessed,
for my eyes are filled with
Krishna, the Son of Nanda.
He is supremely generous, and His form is enchanting.
My anguish is dispelled simply by beholding Him.
He is adorned with sandalwood paste.
The mass of beauty that is young, royal
Mountain-holder Krishna's form
ensnares the Gopis' hearts.
Krishnadas bows to His feet, which are adorned
with the divine markings of the flag,
lightning bolt, kusa grass, and barley.*

9.

Krishnadas falls into a Well

Some days later, a Vaishnava gave Krishnadas three hundred rupees, saying, "I was going to construct a well here in Vraj, but I must return to my native land now. You keep this money and build a well with it."



Krishnadas placed one hundred rupees in a small clay vessel and buried it under a mango tree in a garden near the Govardhan Hill. When an auspicious day arrived, the well construction was begun in a garden at Punchari, on the southern end of the Hill. After some days, the well was completed at the cost of two hundred rupees. The only work remaining was to cement the sides of the well, so Krishnadas decided to spend the last one hundred rupees on that work. One day, after having Shri Nathji's afternoon Utthapan darshan, Krishnadas went out to inspect the well. As he leaned on his wooden cane and looked into the well, his cane suddenly slipped, and he fell into the well.

All the people standing nearby were aghast. Several men ran to get some rope, which they used to lower two men into the well. They searched and searched but were unable to find Krishnadas' body. At that time, Shri Gusainji was just outside the temple after having offered Shri Nathji's supper. Some witnesses to the incident came to Shri Gusainji and reported, "Maharaj! Krishnadas was looking into the well when his cane slipped, and he fell into the well! Two men were lowered into the well but emerged without finding his body."

Ramdas Bhitirya, who was also standing there, then quoted a passage from the Bhagavad Gita: "Those who are steeped in darkness descend to darkness."

Shri Gusainji objected, "Ramdasji, don't say that. Krishnadas is Shri Mahaprabhuji's disciple, a blessed vessel grace and a Vaishnava. This is all part of the Lord's divine drama. Who knows why he fell into the well or where he is now?"

Shri Gusainji knew that Krishnadas had been cursed to become a ghost, but he chose not to reveal the entire situation to Ramdas. Meanwhile, Krishnadas' ghost went to sit in the high branches of a Peepul tree near Punchari.



10.

Krishnadas' Liberation

Shri Gusainji continued, "Krishnadas did an outstanding job managing the affairs of Shri Nathji's temple. Where will we find a replacement to match him? We must consider the fact that the temple cannot run without a manager."

Ramdas replied, "Whomever you appoint shall be the new manager. Shri Nathji's seva is attained through great fortune."

"What soul must I ruin by appointing to this position?" Shri Gusainji asked. "A soul can be purified only with great difficulty but corrupted in an instant."

Shri Mahaprabhuji relates in his Shri Subodhini that Lord Narayana originally related the Shrimad Bhagavatam to Brahma. He had pride of being the Creator and therefore did not receive the true benefit of hearing the sacred scripture. Brahma later told the Bhagavatam to Narada, the celestial sage, who was proud of his ability to wander at will through any realm and hence also failed to receive the fruit of listening to the sacred text. Narada in turn taught the Bhagavatam to Veda Vyasa, who was too impressed with his feat of compiling the entirety of the scriptures to experience the true reward of the sacred text.

Veda Vyasaji taught it to his son, Shri Shukadeva, who had firm renunciation and claimed no high rank or eligibility. Therefore, he was qualified to receive the divine fruit of the Shrimad Bhagavatam: the attainment of Bhagavan, the Supreme Being. Shri Shukadeva later taught the Bhagavatam to King Parikshit, who also had firm renunciation. Therefore, after seven days and nights of continuously listening to the Shrimad Bhagavatam, he too received the divine fruit of Divine realization.



The Path of Grace is the actual form of the Shrimad Bhagavatam. The Path of Grace is given to one who is not concerned with any form of eligibility or recognition. One whose ego is inflated by attaining eligibility, on the other hand, receives no devotional rewards.

Shri Gusainji continued, "To whom shall I give this lofty position of the manager of Shri Nathji's temple? He will certainly become ruined."

Ramdas remained silent. By then it was time to remove Shri Nathji's evening offerings. As Shri Gusainji waved the evening Arati lights, he asked Shri Nathji, "Maharaj! Now that Krishnadas has left his body, we need a manager. Whom should I ruin by appointing to that post? I will appoint whomever You say."

Shri Nathji replied with the same question: "What soul shall I ruin by choosing for that post? Whoever accepts the position will be ruined." The Lord continued, "This is what you should do. Take the temple manager's shawl and announce to everyone, 'Whoever wants the position of temple manager, come forward and accept this shawl.' Appoint whoever comes forward. In this way, let the one who wishes to fall do so on his own accord."

Shri Gusainji was pleased to hear the Lord's words. He finished the seva and put Shri Nathji to rest. The following day, at the time of midday Rajbhog Arati, Shri Gusainji called all the Vaishnavas and Vrajvasis together and announced, "Whoever wants to be the manager of Shri Nathji's temple, come forward and accept this shawl."

Many people called out, "I will!" but one Kshatriya who spoke first was given the shawl. Shri Gusainji then waved the Arati lights before Shri Nathji, completed the afternoon seva, and departed for Gokul.

Some days later, one of Shri Nathji's buffaloes wandered astray. Gopinathdas Gwal and five other



cowherders, who were all great bhaktas and vessels of grace, went towards Punchari to search for the buffalo. As they neared Punchari, they saw Shri Nathji playing with His friends under a Pepul tree. The ghost of Krishnadas was also there, sitting on top of the tree.

The ghost of Krishnadas suddenly called out to Gopinathdas, "Jai Shri Krishna! Gopinathdas Gwal, my friend! Please relay this message to Shri Gusainji: 'I have fallen to this position because I offended you. Still, through your grace alone, I am able to see Shri Nathji.'"

When Shri Gusainji returned from his six months of separation and honored Krishnadas in front of Shri Nathji with the temple manager's shawl, Krishnadas sang,

The son of Vallabh is very gracious. He blesses his own souls by placing his hand upon their heads.

Krishnadas then said to Shri Gusainji, "Maharaj! I caused you to suffer six months of separation from Shri Nathji. Now please forgive my offense."

At that time, Shri Gusainji simply replied, "Shri Nathji will forgive you." It was due to those words that Shri Nathji continued to give Krishnadas His darshan and speak with him even after he became a ghost. However, because Shri Gusainji did not personally forgive Krishnadas, he still had to become a ghost.

Krishnadas even pleaded with Shri Nathji, "Maharaj! You have allowed me Your sight, now why won't You free me from this ghost form?"

"Your liberation is not in My hands," Shri Nathji replied, "but in the hands of Shri Gusainji."

Even though in the Lila, Krishnadas is Shri Swaminiji's sakhi, Lalitaji, he could only be liberated by Shri Chandravali



herself because of what happened in the Lila. Therefore, Krishnadas called out to Gopinath Gwal from the tree, "Please convey my request to Shri Gusainji. Without his grace, I will not be uplifted."

Krishnadas continued, "Also, please tell Shri Gusainji that in a nearby garden, in the direction of the Bilachu Lake, there is a pot with one hundred rupees buried under a mango tree. He should take that money and use it to complete the cement walls for the well. Also, Shri Nathji's missing buffalo which you came here to find wandered into that thicket over there."

Gopinathdas Gwal found the buffalo in the thicket where Krishnadas had indicated and then returned to Gopalpur, where the cowlads milked the cows and buffaloes. After Shri Gusainji had waved the evening Arati lights and completed Shri Nathji's seva, he descended the Hill and proceeded to his baithak in his nearby home. Gopinathdas Gwal came to see Shri Gusainji there, bowed, and said, "Maharaj! Today we went to Punchari looking for one of Shri Nathji's lost buffalos, and I saw Krishnadas as a ghost sitting up in the branches of a Pepul tree. He greeted me with, 'Jai Shri Krishna' and asked me to relay to you the following request: 'I have become a ghost due to my offenses towards you. My liberation is in your hands. Also, there is a pot with one hundred rupees buried under a mango tree, and it should be used to finish building the wall around the well.' Krishnadas also told us where to find Shri Nathji's lost buffalo!"

Shri Gusainji then compassionately reflected, "Krishnadas is suffering greatly. I must free him from his ghost form." Shri Gusainji went out, excavated the rupees and gave them to the new temple manager. That same evening, Shri Gusainji rode to Mathura, and the next



Krishna's Inner Circle

morning, he himself performed Krishnadas' last rites at Dhruva Ghat on the banks of the Yamuna River. Krishnadas left his ghost form and attained a divine body. He proceeded to the divine Lila-door located across from Bilachu Lake by the Govardhan Hill, where he resides as the main sevak. In this way, Shri Gusainji accomplished Krishnadas' Lila attainment.

Here the doubt arises: couldn't Shri Gusainji have liberated Krishnadas through his grace alone? Did he really need to go to Mathura and perform death rites? How could those rituals be superior to the power of grace?

As described above, Gopinathdas Gwal came before Shri Gusainji and conveyed Krishnadas' request to 'Release me from this ghost form.' At that time, there was also a crowd of sevaks and local Vrajoasis standing around. Shri Gusainji could have released Krishnadas with a mere thought, but if any of those sevaks or Vrajoasis later became ghosts themselves, they would have come to Shri Gusainji and asked him to release them as well. If he did not comply, they would have developed an impure mindset towards him, and such negative view would be damaging to their soul.

Shri Gusainji went to Dhruva Ghat in Mathura and freed Krishnadas from his ghost form through the pretense of a death rite. He thereby caused everyone to think that it was the greatness of performing the ritual at Dhruva Ghat that liberated Krishnadas. Therefore the fame of that place would increase, rather than Shri Gusainji's own fame. Shri Gusainji understood the difficulties of these times, and that is why he concealed his own greatness.

Another reason is that, on the excuse of liberating Krishnadas, Shri Gusainji granted liberation to many other souls. The Shrimad Bhagavatam relates that when the bhakta Prahlad asked Lord Nrsinghji if his father would be liberated, the blessed



Krishnadas

Lord answered, "When a bhakta is born into a family, he liberates twenty one generations within his family line."

Prahlada was a bhakta of the Lawful Path, but Krishnadas, being an exalted soul on the Path of Grace, could liberate thousands of ancestors. Even after such liberation, there is no entrance into Shri Krishna's eternal Lila without connection to Shri Mahaprabhuji.

Krishnadasji, Shri Gusainji, and all the beings related to Shri Nathji's Lila on the Govardhan Hill are divine. There was never any mundane jealousy within this lila. It arose in order to bring the Lord's divine play to this world for souls to realize, praise and listen to.

Krishnadas' account is supremely divine. That is why Shri Gusainji once praised, "Krishnadas described the Rasa dance and other lilas so remarkably, like no one else could. He performed seva like no other follower of Shri Mahaprabhuji could, and managed Shri Nathji's temple like no other manager ever will."

Krishnadas was a vessel of Shri Mahaprabhuji's grace. Shri Nathji remains eternally pleased with him, so there is no end to his story. It is beyond description and therefore can never be fully recounted.



Nandadas

Introduction

Nandadas is known for his superb way with words. He created brilliant, original metaphors. The full scope of his poetic genius does not fully emerge in this account, because only a few of his poems were included in his life story. Therefore, let me quote a few lines from his lengthy masterpiece, *Rup Manjari*. Nandadas begins with the source teaching:

*Without the touch of devotional mood,
the essence cannot be known.
Who besides the black bee can know the lotus?...
It's fine to have a shrewd adversary –
A stupid friend is one's real enemy...
Rup Manjari's heart was a magnifying glass –
Her body, a cotton wick dipped in ghee.
When the rays of her Lover shone into her heart,
her body burst into flames.*

Nandadas' poems, like many of the other Ashta Chap's works, may seem to the uninformed like the description of some worldly love play. Nandadas seems to have resolved such issues in his own life, when he was able to take the love he felt for a married Kshatriya woman and redirect it towards Lord Krishna instead. Transformation, as the poet later explains, is not a matter of words, but of experience,



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This union with the Lord is not found in talking, but in undertaking.

A lamp shines not by discussion, but only when lit.

The personality of Nandadas is captured in the Urdu word *mustaram* – 'totally exhilarated.' He was always intoxicated with His Beloved, and his world became full of divine presence. He purified his passions and focused them on the singular divine essence. By comprehending the lives of bhaktas like Nandadas, we can come to recognize the course of our own journey and then bathe in the light of our own divine individuality.



Nandadas

Nandadas

Like the other Ashta Chaap poets, Nandadas has two forms in Krishna's Lila. During the day he is Krishna's friend, Bhoj, and at night, he becomes the Gopi Chandrarekha, a sakhi of Shri Chandravali. Chandrarekha appeared from the sakhi Champakalata and is a manifestation of her sattvik devotional form. Nandadas was born in Rampura, in the northeastern part of India.

1.

Nandadas meets Shri Gusainji

Nandadas was a very well educated Sanodhiya Brahmin and younger brother of the legendary poet Tulsidas.¹ Tulsidas worshiped Lord Rama and followed the Ramanandi sect. He arranged for Nandadas to be initiated into that sect as well. Nandadas however, was very enamored with the ways of the world. He would go to watch dance shows wherever he found them. Tulsidas went to great lengths to convince his brother not to go here and there getting involved in such things, but Nandadas did not heed his advice.

One time, a group of pilgrims came through Nandadas' town on their way to the sacred shrine of Shri Ranchorji [a form of Shri Krishna] in Dwarka. Nandadas thought, 'If possible, I will also join them and go for Shri Ranchorji's darshan.'

When he requested his brother's permission, Tulsidas warned him, "Don't go anywhere! Traveling is



fraught with suffering. You will encounter impious association and become ruined. You will get stuck along the way and won't even be able to reach Shri Ranchorji. Therefore, you should sit at home and remember Shri Raghunathji (Lord Rama)."

Nandadas declared, "I am devoted to Rama, but now I will definitely go and see Lord Dwarkanathji. You may try a million different ways to stop me, but I will not stay here."

Realizing that he could not deter his brother, Tulsidas took Nandadas to the leader of the group, Mukhiya Sirdar and said, "My younger brother here wants to come with you. Look after him, and make sure that he returns home and doesn't stop in any other villages along the way."

The Mukhiya Sirdar assured Tulsidas, "Great! Don't worry about it any further."

After some days, Nandadas and the group of pilgrims reached the city of Mathura in Vraj. Nandadas wandered around the city, fascinated with its beauty, and eventually came to Vishrant Ghat. There he saw many men and women bathing. It all looked very lovely to Nandadas. Seeing all those beautiful people bathing, Nandadas became enamored and thought, "I would like to stay in such a place for some time." Later that night, he reconsidered, "First I will go have Shri Ranchorji's darshan and then return to stay here at Vishrant Ghat."

When Nandadas heard that the group was going to remain in Mathura for another ten days, he planned, "I will proceed to Dwarka alone." After contemplating this all night, the following morning he slipped away without saying anything to anyone. When the Mukhiya noticed Nandadas was missing, he searched all of Mathura trying to find him. Finding no trace of the boy, the Mukhiya finally gave up his search.



Meanwhile, Nandadas proceeded on his way without asking anyone for directions. He eventually lost the road to Dwarka and instead ended up in Sinhananda, in Punjab. He came to a town where there lived a Kshatriya and his extremely beautiful wife, both disciples of Shri Gusainji. As Nandadas passed their house, the Kshatriya's wife had just bathed and was standing outside drying her hair.

The moment Nandadas laid eyes on her, he became totally enchanted and thought, "Can there truly be such a being on this earth?" Meanwhile, she got up and began attending to her daily duties. Nandadas remained standing there and vowed, "From today on, I will only drink water only after I have seen her face at least one time." He then went to find a place to sleep. The following morning, Nandadas returned to that woman's door, where he remained sitting for the entire day. Eventually one of the maidservants told the Kshatriya's wife, "A Brahmin has been sitting by our door since early morning. He has not even taken any water."

"Then why don't you go and ask him why he is sitting there?" she answered.

The maid then went to the door and asked Nandadas, "Why are you sitting here?"

Nandadas confessed, "Only after I see your mistress' face will I drink water and leave."

When the maid explained the matter to the Kshatriya's wife, she insisted, "I will not show my face to him! He will eventually get up and leave on his own."

In this way she tried to dismiss him, but Nandadas held his ground. The maid then said to her mistress, "Let me tell you one story. Once, during the middle of the summer month of Jyesth, we all went to see Shri Gusainji in Gokul. I was there, as were you. Then we accompanied



Shri Gusainji from Gokul to Nathdvara. Along the road, we came across a Muslim fruit vendor who had become disoriented and fallen down in the middle of the road, dying of extreme thirst. As our group approached, one of Shri Gusainji's attendants told the woman, 'Move out of the road and sit somewhere else,' but she was unable to move. Her throat had gone completely dry, leaving her unable to speak. Only her eyes showed any sign of life. Shri Gusainji asked his attendant, 'What is going on here?'

"Maharaj,' the boy answered, 'This Muslim lady has fallen in the road. I have told her many times to get out of the way, but she is unable to move.'

"When Shri Gusainji looked at the woman, she signaled with her hands that she was thirsty. Shri Gusainji told his attendant, 'Quickly give her some water!'

"The water boy answered, 'None of us has any water, and there are no lakes or wells nearby. Where will I find water to give her?'

"There must be some water in my *jhari* pitcher,' Shri Gusainji said.

"But Maharaj!' the attendant objected, 'Your pitcher will become impure.'

"Shri Gusainji rebuked him, 'We can always get a new pitcher, but where will this woman get a new life? Quickly give her some water. You should have compassion for every living creature.'

"The water in Shri Gusainji's pitcher was *prasadi* water that had been enjoyed by Shri Navanita Priyaji. When the Muslim woman drank it, she was refreshed throughout her entire body. She got up and said to Shri Gusainji, 'I had heard of Lord Krishna, but today I have seen Him with my own eyes. You are truly a 'Gusainji,' a Lord, for saving my life.'



"From that day, the Muslim woman lived in Gokul. She brought her finest fruits to Shri Gusainji's door and told his people, 'Buy my fruits!'

"Tell us the price, and then we will buy,' they countered.

"The Muslim woman then offered them a low price, and they began buying from her. She spent her life in this way, selling her fruit for almost no profit to Shri Gusainji's home. Shri Gusainji remained very pleased with her. When she died, she was reborn as a Brahmin in the nearby town of Mahavan. In that birth, she became Shri Gusainji's disciple and achieved spiritual perfection."

After recounting this story to her mistress, the maid said, "So, you should have compassion for all sentient beings. It is not proper that this Brahmin has been sitting by our door since early morning without taking any water or food."

Taking her maid's words to heart, the Kshatriya's wife then went to the door. Nandadas beheld her face and then got up and left. He continued to come every day, see her, and leave. When her Kshatriya husband discovered what was going on, he approached Nandadas and said, "Because you come to my home every day to see my wife's face, everyone mocks us."

Nandadas replied, "I don't ask anything from you, nor do I spoil anything for you. If you say another word to me about this, I will kill myself, and the murder will lie upon your head."

The Kshatriya, afraid of being accountable for murder, decided, "I will not say another word to him."

Nandadas continued to come every day to see the Kshatriya woman's face, and soon the entire town knew about it. The Kshatriya was very embarrassed and told his son, "We cannot live here any more." He sold everything



they owned, packed their personal belongings into a large wagon, and hired five or ten men to accompany them. After Nandadas had come to see the Kshatriya's wife and left that morning, the Kshatriya seated his wife, son and the maid in the wagon, and they set out for Gokul.

When Nandadas came the next morning and found the door locked, he asked their neighbors, "Today the door is locked. Where has everyone gone?"

They rebuked him, "What kind of man are you? Because of the suffering you caused them, they have abandoned their own town. They left yesterday morning for Gokul."

With that news, Nandadas returned to his camp, gathered his belongings, and set out for Gokul. By the late afternoon, he reached where the Kshatriya's family had set their camp for the night. When he sat down near the Kshatriya's wagon, the Kshatriya saw him and lamented, "The very disturbance which caused us to abandon our home and flee our town has followed us here!"

The Kshatriya's men began to challenge Nandadas, demanding, "Why have you come here?"

"I am not asking you for anything," Nandadas replied, "Nor does this town belong to you." He then got up and sat at a slight distance from their camp, where he slept for the night. In the morning, when the Kshatriya's family loaded their wagon and continued on their way, Nandadas followed them at a short distance.

After some days of this, they came to the ghats by the Yamuna River across from Gokul. The Kshatriya considered, "This Brahmin has brought agony to our lives and made us leave our home. It would be good to somehow prevent him from crossing the river and coming to Gokul with us. Otherwise, we will be ridiculed there as well, and then Shri Gusainji will hear about it, which would not be good."



The Kshatriya then said to the boatman, as well as the other people at the ghat, "I will give you some money if you promise not to take that Brahmin over there to the other side."

The Kshatriya and his family sat in the boat, and when Nandadas tried to come aboard, the boatman grabbed his hand and forced him off the boat. Nandadas then stood by the banks of the Yamuna River contemplating his situation while the Kshatriya and his family were ferried across.

When they arrived in Gokul, the Kshatriya had the maid stay with their belongings while he and his wife and son went to have Shri Gusainji's darshan. They arrived in time for Shri Navanita Priyaji's Rajbhog darshan. Afterwards, they went to Shri Gusainji, prostrated, and made a monetary offering to their guru. Shri Gusainji greeted them, "Vaishnavas, when did you arrive?"

"Maharaj, we have just arrived, and through your grace, we just had Shri Navanita Priyaji's Rajbhog Arati darshan."

Shri Gusainji then invited them, "Today, take your meals here. Go ahead and sit down."

With that bidding, Shri Gusainji went to take his meals. Afterwards, Shri Gusainji washed up and then laid out four leaf plates of his own leftovers² for the Vaishnavas. They immediately inquired, "Maharaj, we are only three. For whom did you set the fourth plate? We don't see any other Vaishnavas here."

Shri Gusainji replied, "The Brahmin who came with you, whom you left on the other side of the river – whose home will he be able to go to?"

Hearing their guru's words, they were filled with shame and said, "We were afraid that our ordeal with that Brahmin would become known here in Gokul and hoped



to be spared from further ridicule because of it. Now we see that all this was already well known in Gokul too!"

The three of them became extremely distressed, until Shri Gusainji said, "Why are you troubled? He is a divine soul and has come here due to your association. Now he will no longer trouble you."

Shri Gusainji then summoned a Vrajvasi and told him, "Go across the shore, find the Brahmin Nandadas, and call him here." The Vrajvasi immediately crossed to the other shore, where Nandadas, after being forced off the boat, was sitting singing poems in praise of the divine Yamuna River:

*O, Goddess Yamunaji!
I first came to You because of love.
You understand the condition of Your bhakta's mind.
That is why I have so eagerly run here.
Whatever desires were in my mind and heart
have been fulfilled by worshiping You.
Nandadas' Lord, Shri Krishna is pleased
with those who sing Shri Yamunaji's glories.³*

Nandadas continued with this poem:

*Shri Yamunaji graces Her bhaktas
by leaving the eternal realm
and coming to rest upon the earth,
where She reveals to them the divine Lila.
Shri Yamunaji grants everyone the supreme goal
and bestows upon Her own ones
amazing divine forms like Hers.
Knowing this, Nandadas firmly grabs hold of Her feet.
How can one tongue ever fully describe Her?*



Then he sang a third poem:

*Sing 'Shri Yamune, Shri Yamune, Shri Yamune!
Shesha, with his thousand heads, daily praises
but cannot fully fathom Her.
She affords every pleasure, so call out Her name!
Again and again I say, "Don't forget Her!"
Shri Yamunaji satisfies Nandadas' yearning.
Therefore I say, 'Adhere your mind to Her
every moment.'⁴*

Nandadas sat by the banks of Shri Yamunaji singing Her praises in this way. Meanwhile, the Vrajvasi arrived with the boat and asked Nandadas, "Where is the Brahmin Nandadas?"

"I am Nandadas!" he responded.

"Shri Gusainji is calling you and has sent this boat for you. Quickly sit in the boat and come with me."

Very pleased to hear this news, Nandadas bowed to Shri Yamunaji and to the town of Gokul and then sat in the boat and crossed the river. When he met with Shri Gusainji, Nandadas fully prostrated before the guru. Just by having the darshan of Shri Gusainji, his mind became totally purified. With joined hands, he beseeched, "Maharaj! Since the moment of my birth, I have passed my life in search of trivial pleasures. You are supremely compassionate; now grace me by taking me under your shelter."

Shri Gusainji was very pleased to hear these humble words and told the poet, "Nandadas, bathe and return here." Nandadas bathed and returned in a state of purity, and Shri Gusainji initiated him into the Path of Grace in a divine way. At that moment, Shri Gusainji's divine form became fully established in Nandadas' heart, and he sang



the following poem in praise of his guru:

*Glories to the Lord of Rukmini,
the husband and very life of Padmavati,
the protector of the Brahmins and giver of delight.
You are the light of Shri Vallabh's lineage and
remover of the world's disturbances.
You shine like a billion moons
and eliminate every misery.
Glories to you, master of bhaktas, uplifter of the fallen.
You fulfill the wishes of those who desire.
To those who crave liberation, you award devotion.
You are filled with all of Krishna's potencies
and unlimited virtues.
Glories to your name, whose remembrance grants
the fruit of all sacred pilgrimages
as well as residence in Vraj,
where Krishna always plays.
Nandadas' Lord is the father of Girdhar
and six other sons
and the physical incarnation of
Mountain Holder Krishna.⁵*

Shri Gusainji was very pleased with Nandadas' song and told him, "I have set aside a plate of mahaprasad for you. Go and take it now." Nandadas proceeded to the kitchen and began to eat the plate of his guru's leftovers. As he ate, Nandadas began to have the direct experience of Krishna's bliss form and lost all bodily awareness. He just sat there, not even remembering to wash his hands after eating. When the afternoon seva was about to begin, the cook went to Shri Gusainji to tell him, "Maharaj! Nandadas is still sitting where he took mahaprasad. He hasn't gotten up yet."



"Don't say anything to Nandadas," Shri Gusainji advised him. The entire night passed and Nandadas still remained in that divine state, unaware of his own body. The following morning, Shri Gusainji went directly to Nandadas and spoke into his ear, "Nandadas, get up! It is time for darshan!"

Nandadas immediately arose, then fully prostrated before Shri Gusainji and sang,

*In the morning, sing the auspicious pure glories
of Shri Vallabhacharya's son.
My eyes are cooled when I behold
the face of Mountain-Holder Giridhar,⁶
so beautiful and endowed with fortune.
I listen intently to his sweet, enticing words
and keep them in my heart.
I attain devotional perfection by offering him
my body, mind, and breath.
May I always remain by his feet
and partake of his leftovers.
Nandadas asks this of Krishna:
"Allow me to be a servant of Shri Vallabh's lineage."*

Nandadas then sang,

*When you rise in the morning,
take the name of Shri Vallabh's son on your tongue.
He is a bliss giver, a Lord who creates auspiciousness,
removes strife, and fulfills people's wishes.
You are a friend in this world and the next –
who can explain your vast excellence?
Nandadas' Lord is the crown jewel of those
who savor divine mood.
He is my Beloved and reigns
over the blissful realm of Gokul.⁷*



Shri Gusainji was again very pleased to hear Nandadas' kirtans. Shri Gusainji proceeded into the temple, while Nandadas first bathed and then returned to the temple when the darshan opened. Nandadas was delighted by the sight of Shri Navanita Priyaji and began to sing of Shri Krishna's infant Lilas:

*Mother Yashoda, full of joy,
sings lullabies to her infant Gopal.
She kisses His face, looking over His gorgeous body,
and sings with increasing joy.
Sometimes she rocks Krishna in the cradle,
and sometimes she breastfeeds Him.
Sings Nandadas: "Queen Yashoda finds great pleasure
in beholding the Mountain Holder Lord."
Shri Gusainji was delighted to hear Nandadas'
poem. Nandadas fully prostrated before his guru and
then, with folded hands, prayed, "Maharaj! Will you
uplift me, fallen soul that I am?" Nandadas was a vessel
of Shri Gusainji's grace and a true bhakta.*

2.

Nandadas visits Shri Nathji

One evening while sitting in his room, Shri Gusainji mentioned, "Tomorrow I will go to Nathdvara."

Nandadas then requested, "Maharaj! As you have graced me with the darshan of Shri Navanita Priyaji here in Gokul, please do the same and give me the darshan of Shri Nathji."

The next morning, Shri Gusainji completed Shri Navanita Priyaji's morning seva up to Rajbhog and then set out with Nandadas for Nathdvara. They arrived in the early afternoon in time for Utthapan. Shri Gusainji bathed



and entered the temple. When the doors opened for darshan, Nandadas was thrilled to behold Shri Nathji and sang,

*Shri Nathji's striped, colored turban is so lovely –
how gorgeous are His deer-like eyes!
Dangling earrings shine on His resplendent cheeks.
Every limb of His colorful form is filled with love.
There has never been, nor will there ever be
another like Him.
Nandadas concedes, "Friend, what can I do?
I've been struck by Love's spell."⁸*

Shri Gusainji listened to Nandadas' song from inside the temple before drawing the darshan curtain closed. After that, Nandadas remained sitting there, filled with supreme bliss, singing kirtans. When the Sandhya Arati darshan opened, Nandadas again beheld Shri Nathji and sang more poems:

*Here comes that enticing Lad, Krishna Kanhaai
and His friends, returning from the forest,
walking behind their cows.
The enchanting beauty of His curly locks,
covered in dust raised by the cows, is indescribable.
He is adorned with a yellow sash.
As He wanders about,
playing sweet melodies on His flute,
the chimes on his lovely belt jingle alluringly.
Mother Yashoda wipes the face of Nandadas' Lord
with the corner of her sari.
She never tires of kissing His face.*



Nandadas then sang,

*Krishna returns from the forest,
singing in the Gori raga.
Cane in hand, the fresh Son of Yashoda
comes walking behind the cows.
The Son of Nanda puts the flute to His lips
as if to cast a spell, and with that,
He removes all constraints
imposed by our families.
He is draped in a yellow shawl.
Climbing to their rooftops, the Gopis are stunned
when they behold Him.
Sings Nandadas, "Great is the fortune of those
who behold Hari's face."*

He then sang,

*O, friend! Behold Hari's blushing lotus face,
a nectar lake which attracts black bees
and lures the god of love.
He is covered with flower pollen and the dust
raised by His cows. His lips are lovely.
Nandadas describes, "His pearl nose ring appears
like a cluster of dew drops."⁹*

Lastly, Nandadas sang,

*The ladies of Gokul keep making excuses
to come to Yashoda's home.
Without seeing Krishna's beautiful face,
time just doesn't pass.
Once they gaze upon His lovely countenance,
they forget their household work.*



*They borrow a candle from Yashoda's house
and then blow it out as soon as they step outside.
Blaming the wind, they return to behold
Krishna's beautiful face.
Nandadas' eyes are stuck to Nanda's Son.
Without seeing Him,
a single moment passes like four ages.*

Nandadas sang many such poems before Shri Nathji. After that day, he lived with Surdas in Parasoli for six months. Shri Gusainji always remained pleased with Nandadas. He was a vessel of grace.

3.

Tulsidas writes to Nandadas

Once, a group including five or ten Vaishnavas from Mathura passed by Tulsidas' town on their way to perform some last rites for their deceased ancestors in Gaya. Tulsidas went to their group and asked, "There was a Brahmin named Nandadas who left here and was last seen in Mathura. If anyone has seen him, please tell me."

One bhakta replied, "Tulsidasji, there is one Nandadas who became a disciple of Shri Gusainji. Before, he was an extremely worldly man, but now he has become a great bhakta and vessel of grace."

Tulsidas considered, 'That sounds like Nandadas, but if he has become Shri Gusainji's follower, he will not listen to my advice.' Tulsidas then asked the group, "Will you deliver a letter to Nandadas and send me back his reply?"

"One of my men is going to Gokul tomorrow," one Vaishnava replied. "If you wish, quickly prepare your letter."



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Tulsidasji immediately wrote a letter to Nandadas, insisting, "It is improper that you have left the dharma of loyalty to your Husband, Lord Rama, and taken up the dharma of the immoral. Now come back home, and I will explain to you how to be faithful to your true Husband again."

Tulsidasji gave the letter to the Vaishnava, who entrusted it to a messenger, who eventually arrived in Gokul with the letter in hand. The messenger bowed low to Shri Gusainji and placed the letter from Tulsidasji before him. Shri Gusainji read the letter and called for Nandadas, who then also read the note. Nandadas then composed a reply for his brother and wrote, "First I was married to Lord Ram, but in the meantime Shri Krishna came and stole me away. If Lord Ram is so strong, then how could He have let Shri Krishna do that? Besides, Lord Ram has only one wife – Shri Sita, so how can He look after a second wife?¹⁰ In fact, He wasn't even able to look after one wife properly, because the demon Ravana came and abducted her!

"Shri Krishna, however, is the Lord of infinite women, and after attaining Him as one's Husband, there is no reason to fear. At all times, and without interruption, Krishna affords pleasure to His chosen ones. For this reason, I have made Him my Husband. Please understand this. I have offered my body, mind, and wealth, this world as well as the next, to Shri Krishna. I have fallen under His rule." Nandadas added the following poem to his letter:

*"Friend, since I heard Krishna's name,
I have become mad and forgotten my home.
My eyes well with tears.
My mind reels, and my voice chokes.
What has happened to my body
is yet another matter.*

Nandadas



*After all the many fasts, righteous deeds,
and observances I performed with my whole body,
I finally heard Krishna's name.*

Sings Nandadas,

"This is what happens to one who hears His name.

*Just imagine what will happen
if you see His sweet form!"¹¹*

Nandadas handed this letter to the messenger, who after some days returned to the group of Vaishnavas from Mathura and gave it to them. They read the letter and then called Tulsidasji to give it to him. Tulsidas read his brother's words and knew that, "Now Nandadas will never return here."

So, Nandadas became a blessed vessel of Shri Gusainji's grace and accomplished bhakta. He had firm devotion for the divine form of Shri Gusainji.

4.

Tulsidas visits Vraj

Tulsidasji later decided, "I should go to Gokul and bring my brother, Nandadas back here." He left the city of Kashi (Benares) and after many days arrived in Mathura. There he asked some local people, "Do you know a Brahmin from Kashi by the name of Nandadas?"

Someone finally told him, "There is one Nandadas who became a disciple of Shri Gusainji. He must be either in Gokul or by the Govardhan Hill."

First Tulsidasji went to Gokul. He was delighted by the splendor of the town and thought, "How could my brother ever leave such a place as Gokul?" But when he asked for Nandadas, someone told him, "There is one Nandadas Brahmin, but he must be in Nathdvara with Shri Gusainji."



Tulsidas then went back to Mathura and had darshan of the Yamuna River before proceeding towards the Govardhan Hill. He eventually found Nandadas in the nearby town of Parasoli and insisted, "Come with me. If you like villages, then live in Ayodhya. If you prefer cities, live in Kashi. If you like mountains, then live in Chitrakoot, or if you like forests, live in Dandakaranya Forest. All these illustrious areas were purified by Lord Ram Himself." Nandadas then replied to his brother with the following poem:

*If you like mountains, live by the Govardhan Hill.
If you like towns, then reside in Nandagam.
If you prefer cities, live in Mathura,
an ocean of splendor, extremely pleasing.
If you enjoy rivers, stay by the banks of Yamuna,
Who fulfills all your heart's desires.
Sings Nandadas, "If you like forests, then live
in the sacred lands of Vrindavan."¹²*

Nandadas went to meet with Surdasji and then left Parasoli to go have Shri Nathji's darshan in nearby Nathdvara. Tulsidasji followed behind him. Tulsidasji too had the darshan of Shri Nathji, but he did not bow his head. Nandadas then realized that, "Tulsidas will not bow before anyone other than his beloved Ram. But if I can arrange for him to have the darshan of Shri Ram here, and in Gokul, then he will recognize Shri Krishna's greatness." Nandadas then requested Shri Nathji, in verse:

*What can I say of your splendor today!
You are adorned so pleasingly, my Lord.
Tulsidas will only bow his head
if You hold Ram's bow and arrow in Your hand.*



Hearing Nandadas' prayer, through the intervention of Shri Gusainji, Shri Nathji considered, "Shri Gusainji's disciple is making a request, so I should honor it." Shri Nathji then took the form of Lord Ram [holding a bow and arrow] and gave Tulsidasji His darshan. Tulsidas then fully prostrated himself upon the temple floor.

After leaving the temple, Nandadas headed for Gokul, and Tulsidasji joined him. When they arrived in Gokul and had the darshan of Shri Gusainji, Nandadas prostrated before his guru, whereas Tulsidasji simply stood by. Nandadas then told his brother, "Just as you had Lord Ram's darshan there in Shri Nathji's temple, so you will have darshan here in Gokul as well." Nandadas then introduced him to Shri Gusainji, saying, "This is my brother, Tulsidas. He will not bow to anyone other than Lord Ram."

Shri Gusainji welcomed him, "Tulsidasji! Have a seat."

At that time, Shri Gusainji's fifth son, Shri Raghunathji [one of the names of Shri Ram], who had recently married, happened to be nearby. Shri Gusainji called out to his son, Raghunathji, "Shri Ramachandraji! One of your followers has come here. Give him your darshan."

Shri Raghunathji and his wife Shri Janaki [the name of Ram's divine consort, Sita], then divinely appeared to Tulsidas as Shri Sita and Lord Ram. Delighted by this darshan of the divine couple, Tulsidas fully prostrated before them and sang,

*Now I praise both the towns of Gokul and Ayodhya.
There reside Janaki and her Husband Ram
and here, Shyama and Shyam.
There the incredible Saraju flows,
and here the waters of Shri Yamuna.*



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Both remove the impurities of this age of struggle
and the sufferings of all their bhaktas.
Lord Ram wears a jeweled crown and
rules with His brother Lakshman.
Here Krishna is adorned with
a crown of peacock feathers,
with brother Balaram by His side.
There, the smiling Ram liberated His friend Kevata.
Here, Krishna uplifted King Yadunath from a well
with His own hand.
There, Lord Ram, an ocean of virtue,
granted Sabari heaven.
Here, Krishna took sandalwood balm
from the hunchback Kubja
and fulfilled all her desires.
For the benefit of Their bhaktas,
Ram and Krishna incarnated as men.
Tulsidas' hopes lie with them both:
They will transport anyone
to the shores of liberation.

Tulsidas then also bowed before Shri Gusainji and said, "Maharaj! Nandadas used to be extremely worldly. How is it that he has become such a committed bhakta?"

Shri Gusainji then explained "Nandadas was an exceptional vessel. Therefore, he became very determined after entering the Path of Grace. Now he has attained the state of addiction to Shri Krishna. His devotion has become firm."¹³ Tulsidas was happy to hear Shri Gusainji's words. He then bowed to the bhakti master and returned to Kashi.

Nandadas was such a vessel of Shri Gusainji's grace that, based on his requests, both Shri Nathji and Shri Raghunathlalji were compelled to give darshan in the form of Lord Ram.

Nandadas



5.

Nandadas composes Shri Krishna's Lila in Vrajbhasha

Once Nandadas thought, "My brother Tulsidas has written the story of Lord Ram, the *Ramayana*, in the vernacular. Likewise, I should compose the *Shrimad Bhagavatam*, depicting the lilas of Lord Krishna, in the local language of Vrajbhasha."

After Nandadas finished writing his version of the tenth canto of the Bhagavat, the Brahmin pundits of Mathura all came before Shri Gusainji and complained, "Maharaj! We make our living by reciting the Shrimad Bhagavatam. Now that your disciple, Nandadas has composed it in Vrajbhasha, no one will listen to our discourses, and we will lose our livelihood. The solution to this lies in your hands."

Shri Gusainji then called Nandadas and told him, "Your Vrajbhasha version of the Shrimad Bhagavatam will detract from the Mathura Brahmins' livelihood. Therefore, keep only what you have composed up to the five Rasa Lila chapters, and offer the rest of the text into the Yamuna River." Following his guru's command, Nandadas kept the sections that describe Shri Krishna's Vraj lilas and committed the rest to Shri Yamunaji's waters. Nandadas was such a great vessel of Shri Gusainji's grace to follow the words of his guru.¹⁴

6.

Rup Manjari

Once, Emperor Akbar and Raja Birbal visited Mathura. From there, Raja Birbal went to Gokul to see Shri Gusainji, but the bhakti master had gone to Nathdvara. Birbal instead met with Shri Gusainji's son, Shri Girdharji. When Raja



Birbal returned to Mathura, Emperor Akbar questioned him, "Where did you go?"

"I went to Gokul to see Dikshitji (Shri Gusainji), but he had gone to Shri Nathji's temple by the Govardhan Hill. I met with his son Girdharji and then returned here."

The Emperor then said, "I will also go to Govardhan two days from now. From there, you can go and visit Shri Gusainji."

Two days later, Akbar moved his camp to Manasi Ganga Lake by the Govardhan Hill. From there, Raja Birbal proceeded to Shri Nathji's temple for darshan. He then paid his humble respects to Shri Gusainji and returned to his camp. At that time, Nandadas heard that the Emperor had come to the town of Govardhan.

Emperor Akbar kept with him one maidservant named Rup Manjari, who was a disciple of Shri Gusainji. Shri Nathji had bestowed supreme grace upon her and gave her His direct darshan. Nandadas was deeply in love with Rup Manjari, and so he went to Manasi Ganga to meet with her. He arrived and began looking everywhere for her.

At that time, Rup Manjari had gone off to an isolated forest at Bilachu and in the cover of vines, under a tree, was preparing some food offerings for Shri Nathji. When Shri Nathji appeared there to accept her offerings, Nandadas beheld the Lord and delightedly thought, "Rup Manjari is truly fortunate." Nandadas then stood behind a tree and sang,

*Pretending to look at a picture,
the very clever milkmaid conceals her gaze
and turns towards Krishna.
She looks directly at His face with unblinking eyes,
while pretending to arrange her hair.*



*Mother Yashoda understands and draws a curtain
across the triple-arched terrace
as Krishna's food is brought on a golden tray.
As Nandadas' Lord begins His meal in His home,
He places His hand upon His heart and with a smile,
signals to the Gopi a secret rendezvous.*

When Rup Manjari heard Nandadas singing, she looked around in all directions for the poet. When she finally found him behind a tree, she called out, "Why are you hiding over there? Why don't you come over here?"

Nandadas replied, "I was standing over here because Shri Nathji came to partake of your lunch offerings."

After Rup Manjari completed her worship, she told Nandadas, "I can't tell you what to do, but here is some of Shri Nathji's mahaprasad; although you are a Brahmin, perhaps you can accept at least some of the milk products which were offered."

Nandadas responded, "I will take a bit of everything you have made."

The two bhaktas then sat down together and joyfully partook of the prasad. After finishing the meal and washing up, Rup Manjari mentioned, "How wonderful it would be to stay here forever. This place, 'Manasi Ganga,' has manifested through the grace of Shri Girirajji - Krishna as the Govardhan Hill. I don't want to travel anywhere else; I would love to always remain with you."

Nandadas assured her, "Shri Nathji will arrange it for you."

Rup Manjari longingly added, "My eyes should no longer see the mundane world."

That evening Nandadas returned to his home by the Manasi Ganga Lake, and the following morning he went to see Shri Nathji. That evening, Tansen, the court singer,



happened to sing one of Nandadas' poems for Emperor Akbar:

*Look! Behold agile Krishna
dancing by Yamuna's banks.
He is surrounded by the Gopis.
His peacock crown hangs to one side.
He wears a dancer's skirt with a belled sash
and a yellow shawl.
The glow from His earrings is so bright
that it appears to halt the chariot of the sun
The drums sound, 'Tata thei, tata thei.'
The notes ascend the scale while feet beat in time.
Then, in the middle of the Rasa Lila dance,
Krishna calls out with His flute,
"Shri Radhe! Radhe!"
while Nandadas sings close by.*

Emperor Akbar then asked Tansen, "Where does this poet live?"

Raja Birbal explained, "He is right here. He lives in Nathdvara and is a great bhakta and poet."

"Call him here right now," the Emperor commanded.

Raja Birbal replied, "He will not come if we try to force him immediately. I will personally go to him tomorrow and bring him here."

The following day, Raja Birbal went to Gopalpur [Nathdvara], had Shri Gusainji's darshan, and then approached Nandadas, "Nandadasji! Emperor Akbar is calling you."

Nandadas replied, "What business do I have with Akbar? I don't desire any money from him, nor do I have any wealth that he can take from me. What possible use does he have for me?"



"If you don't go to him, he will come to you," Raja Birbal replied.

"Don't bring him here," Nandadas objected. "There is no place for his crowd. After Shri Nathji's worship is completed this evening and I have paid my respects to Shri Gusainji, I will go to Manasi Ganga and see the Emperor."

That evening Nandadas arrived and found Emperor Akbar and Raja Birbal sitting together. The Emperor respectfully greeted Nandadas and offered him a seat. He then said, "You composed a poem about Lord Krishna's Rasa Lila dance in which you said, 'Nandadas sings close by.' Why did you speak such untruth? How could you have come anywhere near the Rasa Lila dance?"

Nandadas replied, "You would not believe me if I told you. But there is one maidservant named Rup Manjari in your entourage. Ask her about it; she knows."

The Emperor left Nandadas with Raja Birbal and returned to his camp, where he asked Rup Manjari, "What is the meaning of Nandadas' poem about the Rasa Lila?"

Hearing the Emperor's words, she immediately fell to the ground and left her material body. She attained entrance into Shri Krishna's eternal Lila realm. Emperor Akbar ran back to Nandadas and to his great astonishment found that Nandadas too had left his body and returned to Krishna's eternal Lila. The bewildered Emperor asked Raja Birbal, "Why did they both leave their bodies like this?"

Raja Birbal explained, "They kept their dharma secret. Such matters as the Rasa Lila cannot be explained or spoken of. They had no other solution but to leave their material bodies." The Emperor then returned to his tent.

When some Vaishnavas came to know of these events, they went to Shri Gusainji with the news, "Maharaj! Nandadas left his body while he was visiting with Emperor Akbar at Manasi Ganga!"



Shri Gusainji then praised Nandadas, saying, "Vaishnavas should keep their dharma secret as Nandadas did, and not openly reveal it to others."¹⁵

Both Nandadas and Rup Manjari were such accomplished souls; both kept their devotional dharma secret. Nandadas was truly a vessel of grace and accomplished bhakta. Shri Gusainji was always pleased with him and revealed to the poet the bliss of his divine form. There is no way to fully tell his story.



Chita Swami

Introduction

Chita Swami was a Chaube Brahmin from Mathura, the main city in Vraj by the banks of the Yamuna River. Chita Swami's acceptance into the Path of Grace provides a poignant account of the nature of grace. It was purely grace without any intention of his own which landed him in this path. It was all orchestrated by Shri Gusainji with the wish to uplift a wandering divine soul. In return for Chita Swami's false coin and an empty promise, Shri Gusainji awarded him a truth that blossomed into the devotion which he later expressed throughout his sublime collection of devotional poems.

Love, or what is called *rati* in Sanskrit, is the main devotional mood. Without *rati*, the heart cannot find the Beloved Lord. When a blessed one is brought into true proximity, the love form of Hari is established within the yearning, open heart. Then an appreciation of the Lila arises, and as *rati* matures, the all-powerful Lord falls under the sway of His blessed follower's devotion. This condition is an act of pure grace.

Chita Swami's love and devotion to Shri Krishna arose through his guru's intervention. Shri Gusainji awakened the latent seed of devotional love within him. Chita Swami never forgot to pay homage to his guru for that divine transformation and included his guru's name in almost every one of his poems. He saw no difference



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between Shri Gusainji and the Lord. This unity between guru and the Lord extended into his entire world, which became, as it should be, full of the Beloved. In the poet's own words...

*Ahead of me is Krishna, behind me is Krishna.
Here is Krishna, and there is Krishna.
Everywhere I look, all I see is Krishna.*

Chita Swami



CHITA SWAMI

In Krishna's Lila, Chita Swami is Krishna's cowlad friend Subal during the day, and at night he becomes the Gopi Padma, who is very attached to Shri Chandravali (Shri Gusainji's Lila form.) That is why in this world, Chita Swami had such great devotion for Shri Gusainji. Chita Swami manifested from the tamas bhava (unbending devotion) of the sakhi Chandrabhaga.¹

1.

Chita Swami tries to fool Shri Gusainji

Chita Swami was a Chaube Brahmin from Mathura, and everyone called him 'Chitu.' There was a group of five mischievous Chaubes in Mathura, the most rascally of whom was Chitu. They used to tease women. One day, they got together and schemed, "Gusainji in Gokul casts many spells, and whoever goes to see him falls under his sway. Let's go see him and find out how he charms people like that." The five Chaubes then contrived a plan. "We will go to Gokul and show Shri Gusainji a bit of our own cleverness, by offering him a fake coin and an empty coconut."²

They sat in a boat in Mathura and rode to Gokul, where Chita Swami told the other four Brahmins, "You all stay outside. Sit down here, and come inside after you see me trick Shri Gusainji by giving him the empty coconut and counterfeit coin." Shri Gusainji had just arisen from his afternoon rest and was sitting on a cushioned seat reading a book. As Chita Swami gazed upon the Bhakti



master, he suddenly saw Lord Krishna sitting in the place of Shri Gusainji. He felt guilty, "I came to play a joke on Shri Gusainji, but he is *Sakshat Purna Purushottama* – the actual physical manifestation of the fully divine supreme Being! How stupid of me to come here to fool him."

Concealing the coconut and counterfeit coin, he bowed to Shri Gusainji, who greeted him, "Chita Swami! You are well? I have not seen you for a long time."³

Chita Swami replied, "Maharaj! I am yours," and then fully prostrated before Shri Gusainji. He then requested, "Please take me into your shelter and accept me as your disciple."

Shri Gusainji replied, "You are a Chaube Brahmin, fit to be worshipped by me. You can perfectly accomplish everything on your own, so why bow to me?"

Chita Swami confessed, "I don't know what sin I have committed to become a Swami, but now that I have seen you, my true fortune has arisen. Shower that grace upon me which will remove my false sense of being a master, if it is your desire. By simply seeing you, my deceptive ways have been obliterated. Now I am totally in your hands, so do with me as you wish. You are the giver, the Lord Himself, kind to the humble, and an ocean of compassion. Maharaj, how else would the Lord even glance at a soul like me? Now know that I am yours, and please make me your disciple."

Seeing Chita Swami's pure bhava, Shri Gusainji, who is full of kindness, graced him, "Chita Swami, come forward." Chita Swami came close, bowed to Shri Gusainji and sat down close to him. Shri Gusainji then gave Chita Swami first initiation into Shri Krishna's shelter. Chita Swami then sang,



Now I have recognized Krishna.

I came here to deceive,

not knowing the Supreme Lord.

Blinded by ignorance, I could not distinguish

what is great and what is insignificant.

Sings Chita Swami, "He saw me and made me His own.

Shri Gusainji is a treasure of grace."

The other four Chaube Brahmins who were standing outside then said to each other, "Listen, you guys – Shri Gusainji's charm has worked on Chitu. If we stay here any longer, we will also fall under his spell. Let's get out of here!" They ran back to Mathura.

Shri Gusainji then said to Chita Swami, "You came here with an offering. Aren't you going to give it to me?"

Chita Swami thought to himself, "The coin is fake and the coconut is hollow! How can I offer them to him?" Then he considered, "But these offerings will be sent to the storeroom with all the others, so no one will ever know that they came from me."

Shri Gusainji again said, "Chita Swami, you brought a coconut for me. Why are you hiding it?"

Chita Swami face shriveled as he realized, "Shri Gusainji is the Lord Himself. If he knows that I brought a coconut, he must also know that it is hollow!" He submitted, "Maharaj! You know about all of my deeds. Now forgive me for what I have done."

Shri Gusainji answered him, "Chita Swami, you are famous in this world. Don't hold any doubts in your mind. Now you are mine, so what is there to fear? Bring me the coconut."

Chita Swami remained puzzled, so Shri Gusainji told his attendant, "Haridas! There is a coconut tied in Chita Swami's cloth, open it and bring the coconut to me."



Haridas did as his guru asked and collected the hollow coconut and fake coin from Chita Swami's cloth and placed them before Shri Gusainji. Shri Gusainji then said, "Haridas, cut the coconut open and give half to Chita Swami."

Haridas cut open the coconut, gave half to Chita Swami, and broke the other half into little pieces and distributed a little bit to everyone else there. Shri Gusainji continued, "Chita Swami, give a bit of that coconut to each of your four friends who came here with you."

Chita Swami then bowed to Shri Gusainji and tied the piece of ripe coconut in his cloth. Observing the merciful ways of Shri Gusainji, Chita Swami reflected, "I was being swept away in the ocean of samsara, but Shri Gusainji caught hold of my arm. He even removed the affliction and guilt I felt after bringing him a fake coin and empty coconut. He has truly bestowed his grace upon me." Delighted with these events, Chita Swami sang this new poem:

*I take the shelter of his lotus-petal like feet.
The son of Shri Vallabh is an ocean of grace.
He grabbed hold of my arm and delivered me
from the worldly flow.
His fresh toenails shine like the autumn full moon.
In a moment, they extinguish the three fold miseries.
Sings Chita Swami,
"Shri Gusainji is Mountain-Holder Krishna.
Even the Vedas cannot even fully praise him."⁴*

Shri Gusainji was pleased to hear this poem. Chita Swami bowed again and offered, "Maharaj! You are truly Krishna. Even the Vedas are unable to fully praise you, so how could anyone else have the power to sing your glories?"

Later, when the early evening Sandhya darshan was about to open in the temple, Shri Gusainji told Chita



Swami, "Now go and have the darshan of Shri Navanita Priyaji."

As soon as he entered the temple, Chita Swami saw Shri Gusainji standing next to Child Krishna and thought to himself, "I just left Shri Gusainji in his room. How did he get here? Perhaps there is another route within the temple." When he exited the darshan hall, however, he again saw Shri Gusainji in his room, seated upon a cushion. Chita Swami was shocked and unable to comprehend how Shri Gusainji could appear in two places at once. After the evening Shayan Arati darshan, Chita Swami was given mahaprasad. Then Shri Gusainji told him, "Tomorrow, go to the Govardhan Hill and have the darshan of Shri Govardhan Nathji. Then return here." Chita Swami slept there in Gokul that night.

In the morning, after having darshan of the seven Krishna svarupas residing in the temples of Gokul and Shri Gusainji, Chita Swami crossed the Yamuna River and headed straight for Shri Nathji's temple on the Govardhan Hill. He arrived just in time for the midday Rajbhog Arati. At that time, he beheld Shri Gusainji in the temple, standing next to Shri Nathji. He wondered, "When did Shri Gusainji arrive here?" When the darshan closed and Chita Swami climbed down the Hill, he began to ask everyone, "When did Shri Gusainji arrive?"

Some sevaks replied, "Shri Gusainji is not here; he is in Gokul."

Chita Swami finally concluded, "I definitely beheld Shri Gusainji in Shri Nathji's temple just now. And yesterday I saw him in his room and Shri Navanita Priyaji's temple at the same time. He grants me his darshan everywhere and therefore must be the Lord Himself."⁵

Chita Swami returned to Gokul and arrived in the afternoon at the time when Shri Navanita Priyaji's



Utthapan bhog was being offered. At that time, Shri Gusainji was in his room, and when Chita Swami arrived he asked, "Chita Swami, did you have Shri Nathji's darshan?"

"Maharaj," Chita Swami replied, "I had Shri Nathji's darshan and beheld you standing by His side!" Shri Gusainji smiled. Then Chita Swami thought without a doubt, that "Shri Nathji and Shri Gusainji are truly one form." With this insight, Chita Swami then sang,

*Glories to Vasudeva –
The fruit of His great austerities ripened
into the form of Shri Vallabhacharya.
Glories to Gopal, Who lived in Gokul
and has now returned as Shri Gusainji
to reside once again in His hometown.
Glories to those Gopis who lived in Vrindavan!
They are the manifested form of the Vedic mantras.
Sings Chita Swami, "Shri Gusainji is Krishna
and Krishna is Shri Gusainji:
of this there is no doubt."⁶*

Shri Gusainji was delighted to hear Chita Swami's kirtan. That evening after Shayan Arati, Shri Gusainji served Chita Swami mahaprasad with his own hands. Two days later, Chita Swami bathed in the Yamuna River and came before Shri Gusainji, requesting with folded hands, "Maharaj! Grace me with the initiation of dedication."

Shri Gusainji then initiated Chita Swami in front of Shri Navanita Priyaji." Afterwards, Chita Swami requested, "Maharaj, with your permission, I will return home."

Shri Gusainji replied, "Have Rajbhog Arati darshan first before you leave."



After Rajbhog Arati, Shri Gusainji was seated in his baithak when Chita Swami again bowed and requested permission to leave. "First take mahaprasad, and then leave," Shri Gusainji answered.

Shri Gusainji then arranged Chita Swami's plate of prasad with his own hand before going to take his meals with his seven sons. Afterwards Chita Swami again came to Shri Gusainji in his room and the guru gave him mahaprasadi betel nut. "Now go home, Chita Swami," Shri Gusainji said.

Chita Swami returned to Mathura, where his four troublemaker friends met him and asked, "What were you doing there? We know everything – you have fallen under his spell!"

Chita Swami replied, "I have become Shri Gusainji's disciple and now have nothing further to do with you." Hearing these words, the four Chaube Brahmins were silent. Such is the intense power of Shri Gusainji.

Through Shri Gusainji's grace, Chita Swami composed many kirtans and became a king among poets. He was a true vessel of grace and intimate devotee.

2.

Chita Swami renounces Birbal

Once, Chita Swami went to Raja Birbal's home to collect offerings, for he was Raja Birbal's religious guide.⁷ Raja Birbal offered Chita Swami a place to stay, so he spent the night there. An hour before sunrise, Chita Swami awoke and sang the following poem:

*All glories to Shri Vallabhacharya's son.
He is supremely blissful, the destroyer of hypocrisy
and the uplifter of the Vedas.
He is extremely pure and a mansion of austerity.*



*Full of essence, his lovely form purifies.
His Vedic teachings, delightful and full of the nectar
of Shri Krishna's Lila, uplift all souls.
He confidently gives all of his followers
the Krishna reward,
according to the nine-fold path of devotion.
He liberated a senseless ghost and freed
the sinners Hatit and Patit.
Lord, I haven't the wits to fully praise
your boundless virtues.
Sings Chita Swami,
"Shri Gusainji is the Mountain Holder,
appearing as an incarnation of Lord Krishna."*

Birbal did not appreciate this poem and thought, "What is he singing about?" He kept it to himself and did not say anything to Chita Swami. Later that morning, after Chita Swami bathed in the Yamuna River and made an offering to his Krishna, he began to sing the poem he had previously composed, with the last line, *Shri Gusainji is Krishna and Krishna is Shri Gusainji: of this there is no doubt.*

When Birbal heard this, he became very angry and told the poet, "Earlier you sang 'Shri Gusainji is the Mountain Holder, appearing as an incarnation of Lord Krishna,' and now 'Shri Gusainji is Krishna and Krishna is Shri Gusainji.' If our Muslim Emperor, Akbar, hears these poems of yours about Shri Gusainji being Shri Krishna, how will you explain yourself?"

Chita Swami retorted, "If the Emperor asks me, I will give him my answer. But now I'm afraid you too have become a Muslim, for this negativity has arisen in your mind. Therefore I will never look at your face again." Thus rejecting Birbal, Chita Swami left for Gokul to see Shri Gusainji.



Meanwhile, a messenger reported to Emperor Akbar, "Sahib! Birbal's religious guide, Chita Swami, was with him in Mathura, when suddenly he rebuked Birbal over some matter and left him."

When Birbal returned to the Emperor's court, Akbar inquired, "Birbal, why did your religious guide become angry with you and leave?"

Birbal replied, "Brahmins are like that. They get furious over something innocent said in passing."

"Tell me exactly what you said," Akbar insisted.

Birbal answered, "He sang two poems in praise of Shri Gusainji. All I said was, 'What would you say to the Emperor if he were to ask you about those poems?' With that, he became furious."

Emperor Akbar replied, "Birbal, what Chita Swami sang is true. You must remember what happened the time I was passing by Gokul in a boat and came upon Shri Gusainji, who was sitting at the ghats and gave me his blessings? At that time, I had with me a magic jewel that yielded two ounces of gold every day, and I gave it to Shri Gusainji. Taking it into his hands, he asked me three times, 'You are giving this to me?' Each time I replied, 'I have given to you.' Then Shri Gusainji threw the jewel into the Yamuna River! I immediately sat down, and then asked, 'Give me back my jewel!'

"Shri Gusainji then dipped his hand into the Yamuna River and withdrew a handful of identical jewels. He said to me, 'If your jewel is among these, select it and take it back.'

"When I did not take any of the jewels, he asked me three times, 'You are sure you don't want your jewel back now?'

"After I replied, 'No,' three times, he threw them all back into the Yamuna River.



"Birbal, you have forgotten that incident! Such an act is not possible without the grace of the Lord. Therefore you should not have such doubts or speak such things to your religious guide, because Shri Gusainji is indeed the Lord Himself." Hearing the Emperor's words, Raja Birbal was silent, for what could he say by way of reply?

Such is the intense spiritual power of Shri Gusainji that even the Muslim Emperor could recognize him as the manifest Lord. Raja Birbal, however, was turned away from Krishna and therefore was unable to fully understand Shri Gusainji's form. Shri Gusainji himself occasionally mentioned, 'Raja Birbal is turned away from Lord Krishna.'

Chita Swami was such a vessel of Shri Gusainji's grace and an intimate bhakta of Shri Krishna.

3.

Chita Swami refuses to leave

On that day when Chita Swami left Birbal and went to Gokul, Shri Gusainji and his eldest son, Shri Girdharji were at Shri Nathji's temple in Nathdvara, where they heard that, 'Chita Swami has forsaken his source of income and come to Gokul.' Shri Gusainji had previously heard that Chita Swami had gone to Birbal to collect his earnings. Now he heard how Chita Swami rejected Birbal and left for Gokul. At that time, some Vaishnavas from the distant town of Lahore had come to have Shri Nathji and Shri Gusainji's darshan. Shri Gusainji told them, "I am going to send Chita Swami to you. Take good care of him." Those Vaishnavas bid farewell to Shri Gusainji and left for their home.



After three or four days, when Shri Gusainji still had not returned to Gokul, Chita Swami went to the Govardhan Hill, where he had the sight of Shri Nathji and experienced extreme bliss in his heart. After Shri Gusainji had completed Shri Nathji's worship and retired to his baithak, Chita Swami came before his guru and told him all that had happened between him and Raja Birbal. Shri Gusainji was pleased to hear Chita Swami's words. Shri Gusainji then wrote a letter to the Vaishnavas from Lahore with his own hand, saying that he was sending Chita Swami to them and that they should arrange for everything he needed there. He gave the letter to Chita Swami and said, "Go ahead to Lahore."

"Maharaj!" Chita Swami objected, "What will I do in Lahore?"

"I have told those Vaishnavas to expect you, so they will attend to you well." Hearing the words of his guru, Chita Swami sang,

I am a follower of Shri Vitthalnathji, Shri Gusainji.

I always serve the son of Vallabh.

What would I do in Kashi?⁸

One who leaves the Lord

to chase after another is a demon.

Chita Swami declares, "Shri Gusainji is Krishna.

His speech illuminates the Vedas."

After hearing that poem, Shri Gusainji understood Chita Swami's heart and reflected, "He is not going anywhere."

Chita Swami then said, "Maharaj, I did not become a Vaishnava to go around and beg from others. Raja Birbal had some offerings for me that I was going to take, but when he spoke to me with the intelligence of a barbarian, I



stood up and came here. Now there is nothing that will take me away from the lotus feet of my King. I will go nowhere else. So how could I do such a thing as go to those Vaishnavas and ask for offerings?"

Pleased with Chita Swami's reply, Shri Gusainji approvingly remarked, "Such is the dharma which all Vaishnavas should follow."

Shri Gusainji then wrote in the letter to the Lahore Vaishnavas that Chita Swami would not be able to come after all, as he was a poor Brahmin, but that if they still were able to offer the poet something, they could send it with a messenger. When the Vaishnavas received Shri Gusainji's letter, they packed one hundred rupees for Chita Swami and sent a messenger to deliver it to him. In a letter to Shri Gusainji, they wrote, "Maharaj, we have sent this offering for Chita Swami and will send it every year along with our offering to you."

Shri Gusainji shared this news with Chita Swami, who became very pleased. Shri Gusainji was equally pleased with those Vaishnavas.

When Chita Swami left Raja Birbal, he actually increased Shri Gusainji's fame, for Shri Gusainji was able to arrange for the poet to receive as much from the Vaishnavas as Chita Swami himself could have procured from Birbal. Therefore, bhaktas should have firm faith in Shri Nathji, for why wouldn't the Blessed One look after those who have firm refuge in Him? Vaishnavas should maintain that kind of undivided dedication.

If Chita Swami had followed Shri Gusainji's order to go to Lahore, he would have received offerings from those Vaishnavas one time, but what would he have done after that? Due to his firm faith, Chita Swami's financial needs were taken care of for the remainder of his life, without him needing to go elsewhere to ask for money. Devotees should hold one-pointed



shelter in the singular Lord, as did Chita Swami. By maintaining firm shelter in one Shri Mahaprabhuji, all rewards are attained.

Those Lahore followers always sent Chita Swami an offering along with their yearly offering to Shri Gusainji. They too were vessels of Shri Gusainji's grace and intimate bhaktas. To what extent can we praise the story of those Vaishnavas and Chita Swami?⁹

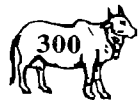


Govinda Swami

Introduction

The story of Govinda Swami, who becomes Govinda Das, is perhaps the most tender and touching of these accounts. He is divinely intoxicated and not particularly concerned about anything except Shri Krishna. Many of his poems are sung in evening ragas, depicting the nighttime lilas of Shri Radha and Krishna, yet he is also Shri Krishna's daytime playmate. There are perhaps no other accounts which reveal such a fun-filled relationship as that which flourished between Govindadas and His beloved Lord, Shri Nathji. He would let Shri Krishna's ride him like a horse and carried Him around the Govardhan Hill. He climbed trees with Shri Nathji in the afternoons before Shri Nathji had to return to His temple for the evening worship. Then, during the evening, Govindadas would reveal in verse the intimate plays of Radha and Krishna.

It is notable that while Govindadas had such a close friendship with Shri Krishna that he even threw pebbles at Him, he would not so much as put his foot into the Yamuna River, whom he recognized as Krishna's consort. The ways of loving devotion are as deep and winding as the sacred river's path. All the anecdotes concerning Govindadas' relationship with Shri Nathji are full of deep meaning, and each offers a devotional lesson. Even his guru, Shri Gusainji seems to have savored these tales whenever he witnessed or heard of them.



Krishna's Inner Circle

This narrative clearly reveals the guru's grace; Shri Gusainji called Govinda Swami to him and immediately revealed Krishna's Lila to this worthy disciple. It was then that Govinda Swami, a 'master,' became Govinda *Das* – the follower.

In the life account of Govindadas, we see how grace-filled Krishna appears within His own creation. Taking into consideration the particular nature of His bhaktas, the blessed Lord graces them by appearing before them, here in this world, in way that is totally comprehensible to them. For seekers of knowledge who lack devotion, the Lord is merely the Absolute, devoid of perfect personality. They can never relish or even understand the very personal relationship that is demonstrated in Govindadas' story. For them, form is a disturbance. That was not the case for Govindadas, who not only became Krishna's friend, but also had entrance into Krishna's most intimate lilas.

The divinity Govindadas experienced during his lifetime allowed him a perfect exit from this world, as he entered into the eternal Lila with his mortal frame. He left no body to be cremated – only a divine record of his plays with Shri Krishna.

Govinda Swami



GOVINDA SWAMI (GOVINDADAS)

In Shri Krishna's Lila, Govinda Swami appears as the cowlad 'Shri Dama' during the day, while at night he becomes the Gopi 'Bhama.' She is a sakhi of Shri Chandravali (Shri Gusainji's Lila form), which is why Govinda Swami was very attached to Shri Gusainji in this world. Govinda Swami arose from Visakhaji and is her sattvik form.

1.

Govinda Swami meets his Guru

Govinda Swami previously lived in the town of Antari. He was known as 'Swami' and had many followers, but being a great devotee of the Lord, he eventually left Antari and came to Vraj.¹ He stayed in the town of Mahavan, considering, 'This is the land of Vraj! How could one *not* attain Shri Krishna's lotus feet while living here in His sacred realm?'

Govinda Swami was a great poet and composed a vast collection of poetry. Once, a singer learned one of Govinda Swami's poems and sang it before Shri Gusainji. Pleased with the poem, Shri Gusainji gave the singer some prasad. That singer returned to Govinda Swami and told him, "I went before Shri Gusainji in Gokul and sang one of your poems. He was very pleased and gave me some prasad. Now teach me more of your poems."

Govinda Swami reflected, "If there is anything of value in this world, it is the town of Gokul and Shri Gusainji, who resides there. But, for some reason, I am unable to



meet him." Many days passed, until one day Govinda Swami met a disciple of Shri Gusainji who was on his way to Vrindavan. They sat together in a quiet place, and in the course of their conversation, Govinda Swami asked the Vaishnava, "How is it possible to directly know Shri Krishna's lilas?"

"I will tell you later," the Vaishnava answered.

Govinda Swami persisted, "I have been eager to know this for so many days, and now you are telling me, 'I'll tell you later'? When will we ever find such a private place like this to sit alone and discuss this? Please grace me and tell me now."

Seeing Govinda Swami's extreme eagerness, the Vaishnava began, "These days, Shri Gusainji, Vitthalnathji, has brought Shri Krishna under his sway. Therefore, through him, one can attain the lotus feet of the Lord. It is useless to take the shelter of anyone else."

Hearing this, Govinda Swami became even more eager and excitedly told the Vaishnava, "Come with me to Gokul!" They slept there that night and set out together in the morning. When they reached Gokul, Shri Gusainji had just offered lunch to Shri Navanita Priyaji and was on his way to the Yamuna River to perform his sandhya prayers. The Vaishnava told Govinda Swami, "Here is Shri Gusainji."

Seeing Shri Gusainji performing a brahminical ritual, Govinda Swami thought, "This guru is some great karma yogi who performs Vedic rituals. How could he possibly unite anyone with Shri Krishna?"²

As Govinda Swami contemplated thus, Shri Gusainji finished his sandhya prayers and called out, "Govinda Das! When did you come?"

"My Lord," Govinda Swami answered, "I came just now." Shri Gusainji then proceeded towards the temple, and as Govinda Swami followed, he thought, "He had never



seen me before. How did he recognize me and call me by name? There must be some reason for all this."

Shri Gusainji then removed the food offerings and opened the doors to his Child Krishna, Shri Navanita Priyaji's temple. As Govinda Swami looked on, Shri Gusainji waved the Rajbhog Arati lights and graced Govinda Swami with the direct vision of Krishna's divine form, steeped in His nectar-filled childhood lilas.

Afterwards, Govinda Swami said to Shri Gusainji, "Maharaj! You are very tricky. On the outside it appears that you are just performing Vedic rites, but Shri Krishna Himself actually resides here in your home!"

The guru replied, "The path of devotion is a flower, and the path of karma is like the thorns."

A flower cannot remain without the protection of thorns. In that same way, the path of karma³ protects the flowers of one's devotion. Without the thorns of proper action, the devotional flower cannot bloom and will not remain. Devotion is a secret thing and therefore should not be openly exposed.

Govinda Swami was very pleased to hear Shri Gusainji's explanation and requested, "Maharaj! Grace me."

"Bathe and return here," Shri Gusainji answered. Govinda Swami immediately bathed and returned in a state of purity. Shri Gusainji then graced the poet with both initiations of shelter and dedication. He then put Shri Navanita Priyaji to rest and went to take his meals. Afterwards, Shri Gusainji offered Govinda Swami a plate of mahaprasad with his own hands. After enjoying his meal, Govinda Swami washed his hands and then bowed to his guru. From then on Govinda Swami began to live in Gokul. Shri Gusainji always remained pleased with him and



showered his grace upon the poet. Govinda Swami was such a vessel of grace and intimate bhakta of the Lord.⁴

2. Govinda Swami's Death

When Govinda Swami lived in Antari, he had many disciples of his own and was called 'Swami.' One day some people from Antari came to Gokul in order to find Govinda Swami and take initiation from him. They asked around for Govinda Swami and eventually found his house, where his sister, Kanhabai told them, "He went to bathe near Yashoda Ghat."

The people from Antari proceeded to Yashoda Ghat, where Govinda Swami was sitting by the banks of the Yamuna River. They approached him and asked, "Where is Govinda Swami?"

He replied, "Govinda Swami died many days ago."

The visitors from Antari then returned to Govindadas' house in Gokul. When Govindadas returned a short while later, they recognized him and protested, "You told us that Govinda Swami had died, but you are him! Swami, why did you tell us that you had died?"

"If he hasn't died yet," replied Govinda Das, "now he will."⁵

Why did Govindadas say such a thing? Great bhaktas do not lie. The reason is that those people had asked for Govinda 'Swami.' He told them that the Swami was dead, for he had become a 'Das,' a follower, instead.

Govindadas then told the visitors, "If you want to take initiation, you must go to Shri Gusainji."

"Take us to him," they pleaded.



Shri Gusainji brought them to Shri Gusainji, and they became his disciples. Those bhaktas remained in Gokul for four days and then returned to their homes in Antari. Govindadas was such a vessel of grace and accomplished bhakta.

3. Govindadas will not bathe in the Yamuna River

Govindadas never bathed in the Yamuna River. He would not so much as place his feet in her sacred waters, choosing instead to bathe with water from a nearby well. He often rolled in the sands on Yamuna's banks. He would drink as much of her waters as he could hold in his palms, but never used her waters to do *achman*.^{*} Such was his bhava for the Yamuna River. Knowing the Yamuna River to be the physical form of Krishna's divine consort, Shri Yamunaji, he thought, "How can I put this useless body into her sacred waters?" Govindadas was filled with the deepest bhava for Shri Yamunaji's divine form.

One day, Shri Gusainji's sons Shri Balkrishnaji and Shri Gokulnathji were going to the Yamuna River to bathe and saw Govindadas standing by the banks. They decided, "Today we should arrange for Govindadas to bathe in the Yamuna River."

As the two brothers took hold of Govindadas and began to lead him towards the river, the poet protested, "Maharaj! Don't dunk me in the water; if you do, the fault will not be mine, but your own. Shri Yamunaji is the physical form of Shri Swaminiji, Krishna's beloved consort. Her form is divine and of a Lila nature, so how can I place this worthless body of mine into her waters?"

^{*} Rinsing the mouth and spitting out the water to cleanse the mouth after a meal.



After Govindadas stated his case, the brothers let him go. At that moment, they all beheld Shri Yamunaji's divine Lila form as Krishna's beloved. Govindadas recognized her true form and commented, "Maharaj! This goes to show that only supreme things should be offered to Shri Yamunaji."⁶ Govindadas was such a vessel of grace and a blessed bhakta.

4.

Shri Gusainji's Bhagavata

One night, Shri Gusainji explained to Govindadas the final verse of the eighteenth chapter in the tenth skandh of the Shrimad Bhagavatam, elaborating upon the grammar and meaning of that verse late into the night. When Shri Gusainji finally rose to go to sleep, he told Govindadas, "You should also go now and take rest."

Govindadas bowed to his guru and went on his way. At that time, Shri Gusainji's sons Shri Balkrishnaji, Shri Gokulnathji and Shri Govindarayaji were laughing and playing together in their chambers with some Vaishnavas. When Govindadas walked by, Shri Gokulnathji called out to him, "Govindadas! Where are you coming from at this hour?"

"Maharaj," he answered, "I was with Shri Gusainji."

"What were you discussing?"

"The last shloka of the Venu Gita," the poet answered.

"What was the explanation of that shloka?"

"Maharaj," Govindadas replied, "Shri Gusainji himself gave the explanation, so what can I tell you? Nothing I say could even come close to his words."

Shri Gokulnathji then commented, "Govindadas knows my father well."



Govindadas, who had become such a blessed follower, then returned home.

5.

Shri Nathji's Two Lunches

One day, Shri Nathji and Govindadas were playing together by the Apsara Lake. When Govindadas later returned to the Govardhan Hill and found that Rajbhog Arati had already taken place in Shri Nathji's temple, he asked, "Who enjoyed Rajbhog here today? Shri Nathji only returned to the temple just now."^{*}

Shri Gusainji then had a second Rajbhog offering prepared and presented it to Shri Nathji. Then the Arati lights were waved a second time before closing the temple for the afternoon.

Here the doubt arises: While Shri Nathji was out playing with Govindadas, who was being worshipped in the temple? In reply to this, it is explained that in Shri Vallabhacharya's Pushti Marg, the Path of Grace, Shri Krishna resides in two ways: Pushti (grace-filled) and Maryada (lawful). In His purely grace-filled form as Pushti Purushottam, He accepts the cloth, ornaments, and other things which are offered to Him everywhere. When He gives darshan in the temple, it is in His lawful form, which does not speak.

So, the blessed Lord contains these two kinds of divine forms. His 'Sarvoddharak' form, with which He 'uplifts everyone,' resides in a primarily lawful fashion and gives darshan to anyone. Meanwhile, His 'Bhaktoddharak' divine form 'uplifts the bhaktas,' and is not visible to all. Until a Vaishnava develops love, he or she can only be accepted by and have the darshan of Shri Krishna's primarily lawful (Maryada-Pushti) form.

^{*} The waving of Rajbhog arati lights takes place after Shri Nathji's lunch has been offered and removed.



Shri Krishna's Bhaktoddharak form, Who uplifts the bhaktas, resides within the Sarvoddharak, lawful divine form sitting upon the throne in the temple and sometimes emerges out of that form in order to provide His bhaktas with a direct experience. He speaks with His bhaktas and appears to them in a form they can understand, according to their own nature, be they young, old, or even cows, etc. However, He also may speak and give His direct experience through the very mouth or face of the lawful divine form seen in the temple.

It was the grace-filled, Bhaktoddharak form of Shri Krishna who granted Govindadas His direct experience, while His lawful, Sarvoddharak form, in accordance with the teachings of Shri Vallabhacharya, was enjoying the first Rajbhog which Shri Gusainji had offered in the temple that day. Still, because Govindadas had a special experience which led him to question how Shri Nathji could have enjoyed the first lunch, Shri Gusainji offered a second Rajbhog. If Shri Thakurji gives a command either directly or through a Vaishnava, it should be seen as the grace of the Lord Himself. Shri Gusainji understood this particular situation to be the wish of the Lord and therefore offered Shri Nathji a second Rajbhog.

6.

Shri Nathji's Friend

Govindadas, Kumbhandas, and the cowherd Gopinathji were three bhaktas with whom Shri Nathji would play all alone. Shri Gusainji showed them everything about Krishna. Govindadas remained with Shri Nathji all the time. They often played alone near Punchari at the southern end of the Govardhan Hill.

One day, when it came time for Shri Nathji to return to the temple for His Rajbhog lunch offering, He and Govindadas walked together from Punchari towards the



temple. The cook Gopaldas, who was also returning to the temple after bathing in Apsara Lake, saw them. He later told Shri Gusainji, "Maharaj, I just saw Govindadas and Shri Nathji returning together from Punchari!"

Hearing these words, Shri Gusainji remained silent. He then offered Shri Nathji His lunch. Govindadas was such an exclusive friend of Shri Nathji, a vessel of a Shri Gusainji's grace and accomplished bhakta.⁷

7.

Krishna's Turban

Another time, Govindadas went up the Govardhan Hill to have Shri Nathji's afternoon Utthapan darshan. When he entered the temple, he noticed that the *pecha* ornament tied at the front of Shri Nathji's turban was crooked. Shri Nathji was adorned with a simple turban, which Govindadas knew how to tie himself. Govindadas asked Shri Nathji, "Maharaj! Why is Your turban *pecha* so loose?"

Shri Nathji replied, "You come and fix it." Govindadas then entered the inner temple, where he fixed Shri Nathji's *pecha* and tightened His turban.

In the meantime, Shri Gusainji arrived in the temple and was told by one of the temple priests, "Maharaj! Govindadas entered the temple and touched Shri Nathji. He fixed His turban and *pecha*." When Shri Gusainji remained silent, the priest again said, "Maharaj! When Govindadas touched Shri Nathji, the temple's ritual cleanliness was defiled."⁸

Shri Gusainji then replied with the following command: "Shri Nathji was not defiled by the touch of Govindadas. Go ahead and offer Shri Nathji His evening meal."



What was the reason for this exception? During the time between temple darshans, Shri Nathji plays with Govindadas, touches him, even climbs up onto him. That is why no purity was lost when Govindadas touched Shri Nathji in His temple. Besides, Govindadas was a Brahmin, so even according to Vedic rules, there was no harm in him touching Shri Nathji.

Govindadas was such a vessel of grace and accomplished bhakta

8.

Pebble Fight

Once, while Govindadas was standing in the temple singing kirtan, Shri Nathji suddenly threw some pebbles which struck Govindadas in the back. Shri Nathji again threw pebbles at him a second and third time. Finally Govindadas threw a pebble back at Shri Nathji, which startled Him. Shri Gusainji noticed and turned around. Seeing that Govindadas was the only person there, he reprimanded him, "Govindadas! What did you just do?"

"Do you only think about your own Son?" replied Govindadas. "Don't you ever consider the plight of others? Before that, He threw three stones at me. Just look at my back!" Govindadas showed Shri Gusainji where the stones had struck him on the back, and added, "After all, in play, no one is a big shot!"

Shri Gusainji was silenced by Govindadas' reply. Then he began to offer Shri Nathji's ornamentation, and Govindadas resumed singing. In this way, Govindadas continually played with Shri Nathji. Govindadas was such a vessel of Shri Nathji's grace and a blessed bhakta.



9.

Krishna dashes Away

One evening in the spring season of Vasant, after Shri Gusainji had removed the evening food offerings and was giving Shri Nathji some betel nut to enjoy, Govindadas stood singing Dhamar kirtans. He sang,

*Shri Govardhana Lal!
With Your wide, unsteady eyes
and the forest garland adorning Your chest,
You enchant all the women of Vraj.
Frolicking playfully,
Krishna reaches the path the Gopis walk
on their way to fetch water.
He tips the jugs off the Gopis' heads
and won't let them draw water from the well.
Krishna, the darling Son of Nanda, plays in this way.
The Vraj Gopis' hearts are filled with joy
when they behold His face.
Beloved Krishna has covered His hands
with red vermillion powder.
He stealthily sneaks up behind the Gopis,
smears their cheeks, and dashes away.*

After completing those three lines, Govindadas suddenly stopped singing. Shri Gusainji questioned, "Govindadas! Why have you stopped singing?"

"Maharaj," Govindadas replied, "Dhamar (Krishna) just dashed away, and my heart and mind went with Him. I just sang, 'He stealthily sneaks up behind the Gopis, smears their cheeks, and dashes away.' He dashed away, and now that is all I can think about. Since He ran away, how can there be any more play?"



Shri Gusainji was enthralled to hear the poet's reply. That evening, after completing Shri Nathji's seva, Shri Gusainji descended the Govardhan Hill and completed Govindadas' poem with one final verse:

*In this way, Krishna plays the spring sport of Holi
with the Gopis.*

Govinda's people rejoice over Shri Nathji's form.⁹

10.

Shri Nathji's Torn Clothes

During the winter, Shri Nathji and Govindadas used to play in a grove of Kadamba trees called Shyam Dak, a few kilometers from the Govardhan Hill. Shri Nathji would meet His cowlad friends there under the trees and play. Sometimes He would climb up into a tree and play His flute to summon them. Govindadas would sit a short distance away and sing kirtan.

One day, Shri Nathji was sitting up in a tree at Shyam Dak while His cows grazed all around in the forest. Meanwhile, Shri Gusainji entered Shri Nathji's temple back in Nathdvara. At that moment, Shri Nathji told Govindadas, "I must return to My temple! It is time for the afternoon seva to begin. What will Shri Gusainji say if he doesn't find Me in the temple? 'Where did you go?' he will ask. That's why I am leaving now."

As Shri Nathji quickly scrambled down the tree and rushed back to the temple, one of His garments got caught on a branch and ripped. Shri Nathji didn't notice, but Govindadas saw from a distance that a piece of Shri Nathji's ripped cloth remained behind on the tree. Just as Shri Nathji arrived in the temple and took His seat, Shri Gusainji opened the doors for the afternoon Utthapan darshan.



When he went to fill Shri Nathji's water pitcher, Shri Gusainji saw His torn cloth. He continued to fill the water pitcher and presented Shri Nathji His afternoon food offerings. Afterwards, he called the door guard, Rupa Poriya, and asked, "Rupa, did someone enter the temple this afternoon?"

"No one came, Maharaj," Rupa replied. Hearing this, Shri Gusainji remained silent. After Shri Nathji had enjoyed the Utthapan offerings, Shri Gusainji told the temple staff, "You wave the evening Arati lights before Shri Nathji tonight, and then complete His evening seva. Don't wait for me." With that, Shri Gusainji descended the Hill and returned to his baithak. All the Vaishnavas came to see Shri Gusainji, but he did not pass a word with anyone until Govindadas arrived and asked, "Maharaj, why are you sitting there looking forlorn?"

"It's nothing," Shri Gusainji replied.

Govindadas persisted, "Something must be troubling your mind. It would be good to share whatever it is."

Shri Gusainji finally conceded, "One of Shri Nathji's garments is ripped. I don't know what dishonor has caused this to happen."

Govindadas laughed and said, "Maharaj! Are you not aware of what happened? Don't you know the nature of your Boy? When you were about to enter the temple this afternoon, He scurried down from the top of a tree, and His cloth caught on a branch and ripped. Come with me and I will show you." Taking Shri Gusainji's arm, Govindadas escorted him alone in the direction of Punchari. When they reached Shyam Dak, Shri Gusainji saw the missing piece of Shri Nathji's garment hanging on a branch and retrieved it with his own hand.

They returned via the Apsara Lake, where Shri Gusainji bathed in preparation to enter the temple. When



he came before Shri Nathji in the temple, Shri Gusainji held up the ripped piece to Shri Nathji's clothes and saw that it matched. Shri Gusainji became very pleased with Govindadas. As he stood before Shri Nathji, Shri Gusainji smiled, and Shri Nathji smiled back at him.

After waving the evening Arati lights and completing the seva, Shri Gusainji returned to his baithak. Govindadas and the other Vaishnavas came and sat before him. Shri Gusainji asked them all, "Now is there anything on your mind?" They remained silent. "We must devise a solution so that Shri Nathji is not troubled by having to hurry back to the temple," Shri Gusainji said. He considered for some time and then told all the temple staff and sevaks, "From now on, blow the conch three times and then wait a moment before opening the temple doors. This will allow Shri Nathji enough time to return to His temple."¹⁰ Govindadas was very pleased to hear this. He was a vessel of grace and accomplished bhakta.

11.

Govindadas becomes a Horse

Shri Nathji used to make Govindadas act like a horse and carry him around the forest on his back. One day, Shri Nathji saddled up on Govindadas' back, and they proceeded on their way. At one point a Vaishnava saw Govindadas standing in the middle of the road urinating. He was shocked to see Govindadas standing in the road peeing, instead of squatting down as is customary, and called out, "Govindadas! What is this all about?"

Govindadas continued on his way with no reply, carrying Shri Nathji towards the Pyau Dak forest. Later, that Vaishnava told Shri Gusainji about Govindadas' strange behavior. When the poet arrived, Shri Gusainji



questioned him, "What is this Vaishnava saying? You were standing in the road peeing?"

Govindadas replied, "Do horses ever sit to urinate? That Vaishnava did not realize that Shri Nathji had made me into a horse and was riding on my back. How could I have stopped to squat down and pee while I was carrying Shri Nathji? That Vaishnava saw me, but he didn't see Shri Nathji saddled on my back."

That Vaishnava then bowed to Shri Gusainji and exclaimed, "Govindadas is blessed! Your grace is upon him." Govindadas was such a vessel of Shri Nathji's grace and an accomplished bhakta.

12.

Early Lunch

Once another bhakta complained to Shri Gusainji, "Govindadas takes his lunch before Rajbhog Arati."

When Shri Gusainji asked Govindadas about this, the poet replied, "I am under His control. As soon as the seva is completed and the Rajbhog Arati lights have been waved, your Boy Shri Nathji comes to me and says, 'Govindadas! Let's go play!' That's why I take prasada before everyone else."

"One shouldn't take prasada before Rajbhog," Shri Gusainji insisted. "Come take prasada after Rajbhog Arati."

"Maharaj, as you wish," Govindadas replied.

The following day, Govindadas had Shri Nathji's darshan at Rajbhog and then immediately after Arati, sat down with everyone else to take his meal. Meanwhile, Shri Nathji came out of the inner temple sanctum and looked for Govindadas. When he finally arrived, Shri Nathji questioned, "What took you so long? I have come here three times looking for you."



"Maharaj, I used to take mahaprasad immediately after You had enjoyed it, but yesterday Shri Gusainji told me to wait until after Rajbhog Arati to take my meals."

Shri Nathji did not say anything further and climbed up onto Govindadas' back and rode out into the forest. When it came time for Utthapan that afternoon, Shri Gusainji bathed, entered the temple, and was beginning to fill a pitcher of water when Shri Nathji told him, "You ordered Govindadas to eat after Rajbhog Arati, so today I was delayed from going out to play in the forest. I looked for him in the temple three times, and then stood waiting for him for the longest time! Tell Govindadas that he should take his lunch early, like he did before."

After presenting Shri Nathji the Utthapan offering, Shri Gusainji descended the Hill and immediately called for Govindadas, who came and bowed before his guru. Smiling, Shri Gusainji said, "Govindadas! Take your lunch as you did before. There is no fault in your doing so. Today you were late taking prasad, so Shri Nathji had to wait for you."

Govindadas bowed to Shri Gusainji and replied, "As you wish." Govindadas was such a vessel of Shri Nathji's grace, a great bhakta and intimate friend of the Lord.

13. Bhairav Raga

One morning, Govindadas was sitting at Yashoda Ghat in Gokul singing *alaap* (the scale) in Bhairav raga. Govindadas had not only a remarkable voice, but also great skill in singing ragas. The way he arranged the Bhairav raga that morning was indescribable. A Muslim passing by heard Govindadas' singing and put his hand to his head in a



gesture of respect, praising the poet, "Bravo! What an amazing rendition of Bhairav raga!"

When Govindadas heard that comment, he thought, "This raga has now been defiled. That Muslim man praised this raga, so how can I sing it before Shri Nathji now?" From that day, Govindadas never composed any poem in the Bhairav raga. He was such a firm vessel of grace and blessed bhakta.¹¹

14. Govindadas hears a Renunciate singing

One day when Govindadas was sitting at Yashoda Ghat, someone came to fill his water pot and started bragging to Govindadas about all the divine moods in his heart. Seeing that he was being overly clever, Govindadas derided him.

Another day, Govindadas was at Yashoda Ghat when a renunciate came and sat down and began to sing without proper tone, sound, beat, or raga. Govindadas called out, "Hey renunciate! Stop your terrible singing! Your tone, raga, and way of singing are all totally off. What is the point of singing like that? If you don't know how to sing, then don't."

The renunciate replied, "I am simply pleasing my Lord Ram. What is the difference if I don't know how to sing properly? My Lord Ram is pleased with my melodies."

Govindadas answered, "Your Lord Ram is not such a fool as to be pleased by your singing. Don't sing any more." The renunciate remained silent.

Govindadas was graced in such a way that he could speak so boldly to everyone. He was such a vessel of grace and blessed bhakta.



15.

Govindadas' Turban

Govindadas tied his turban quite elegantly. Once while on the way from Mahavan to Gokul, a Vrajvasi grabbed the turban off his head. Govindadas warned him, "Fool! That turban has sixteen different pieces!¹² Be careful with it; tomorrow I will come to your home to retrieve it." The Vrajvasi returned the turban to Govindadas and bowed at his feet. Govindadas was such a great bhakta.

16.

Gokulnathji listens to Govindadas

Govindadas sang kirtan on a hill in the town of Mahavan, and Shri Gokulnathji came to listen daily. Shri Gokulnathji told one of his attendants, "Listen carefully: when Shri Gusainji goes for his meals, then quickly come here and call for me." Once the Rajbhog offerings were made in the temple, Gokulnathji would proceed to Mahavan and listen to Govindadas sing, and his attendant would come and call him when it was time for his meals. He did this daily.

One day the attendant went off to do some other work when the time came for Shri Gusainji and the others to take their meals. When everyone asked where Shri Vallabh [Gokulnathji] was, Shri Gusainji said to another attendant, "Go quickly towards Mahavan, where Shri Vallabh is listening to Govindadas' kirtan. Call him for lunch." Gokulnathji went daily to listen to Govindadas, because he was such a great singer. Govindadas was such a vessel of grace and accomplished bhakta.¹³



17.

Keshoraya's Temple

One day Govindadas accompanied Shri Gusainji to the temple of Shri Keshoraya (a form of Krishna) in Mathura. Shri Gusainji entered the inner temple, and Govindadas stood by the door having the darshan of the deity, who was fully covered with jewelry. Heavy silver and gold laced cloth called *jari* had been used to make His lower and upper garments, as well as shawl that was wrapped around Him. Seeing all of this, Govindadas asked Shri Keshorayaji, "Maharaj! Are You alright?" Shri Gusainji heard Govindadas' comment and turned to look at him with a grin.

While leaving the temple, Shri Gusainji said to Govindadas, "You should not say things like that."

"Maharaj!" Govindadas replied, "It is summer, and such a hot day, yet Shri Keshorayaji was covered with gold and silver laced *jari* cloth below, above, and all around. What else can I say?" Shri Gusainji silently smiled. Govindadas was such a blessed vessel of grace.¹⁴

18.

Govindadas' Daughter

Another time, Govindadas' daughter came from Antari to see him, but Govindadas did not even talk to her. His sister, Kanhabai mentioned to him, "You haven't spoken a word to your daughter. You haven't even asked her, 'When did you arrive?' What is going on?"

"I have only one heart. Shall I attach it to Shri Krishna or to her?" he replied. Kanhabai said nothing further.



Some days later, when Govindadas' daughter was preparing to leave, Kanhabai took her to meet with Shri Gusainji's wife, Shri Parvati Bahuji, and their daughters and daughters-in-law. Knowing the girl to be Govindadas' daughter, they presented her with saris, blouses, and bangles. Some other ladies also gave her various small gifts. Govindadas' daughter then bid them all farewell and left for her village of Antari.

When Govindadas returned home, Kanhabai informed him that his daughter had left. "Did anyone give her anything?" he asked.

"The ladies of Shri Gusainji's household gave her some saris and blouses."

Govindadas immediately set out running after his daughter. When he caught up with her, after about three kilometers, he said, "Come back and return whatever Shri Gusainji's family has given you. Otherwise this will be ruinous for us."¹⁵

When Govindadas saw his sister, Kanhabai again, he told her, "Why didn't you give her gifts from our own house instead? Don't do that again." Govindadas was such a vessel of Shri Gusainji's grace and intimate bhakta of the Lord.¹⁶



Chaturbhujadas

Introduction

Generally speaking, divine realization is achieved after steady and continuous practice. In a rare grace-filled circumstance, one could also be blessed with a sudden shower of grace that elevates the soul to the position of intimacy with the Lord. On the other hand, in perhaps the most astounding event in the lives of all eight Ashtachhap poets, the poet Chaturbhujadas was born with complete realization of Krishna Lila! Unlike most souls, who are born with a shroud of *maya*, Chaturbhujadas was Radha-Krishna aware from the moment he appeared on earth.

Chaturbhujadas' father, the poet Kumbhandas, had a burning desire for *satsang*, for someone with whom to share his divine experiences of his beloved Lord. Shri Nathji, Who alone has the power to do, not do, and do what is beyond doing and not-doing, then granted Kumbhandas' wish by giving him a Lila-conscious saint for a son. Even as an infant, Chaturbhujadas spoke with his father about the intimate aspects of Shri Krishna's inner creation, but if someone else came close, Chaturbhujadas would instantly return to his infant state. The father and son even jointly composed a poem about a Radha Krishna lila they experienced together.

This reflects a teaching of Shri Vallabhacharya: "Without question, souls in the Path of Grace are different. They appear for Krishna's seva – for his service and



pleasure." A careful study of the lives of the Ashta Chaap poets reveals that human birth is neither a punishment nor the result of bad karmas, but rather, a way to complete and compliment the divine relationship. Those who seek the divine reward only in divine realms somehow separate from this world have not understood this sublime message. If this world is deemed merely a place to get away from, what sort of respect could there be for the Creator of such a place? For the blessed souls who danced with Shri Krishna here in this world, divinity is found everywhere. With that Lila awareness, all distinctions are erased. What remains is the form and bliss of Brahman.

Chaturbhujadas had perfect communion and continuous play with Shri Nathji. When Krishna teased Chaturbhujadas, the poet had the divine capability to tease Him back! Radha and Krishna followed Chaturbhujadas around and gave him repeated experiences of Their divine existence. Chaturbhujadas lived the very definition of the grace-filled lila, and has sung of that state:

*Friend: Today, tomorrow, and every day,
He is more and more –
behold nectar-filled Krishna!*

Chaturbhujadas' devotion to Krishna and his guru, Shri Gusainji, were the guiding forces of his bhakti. His life is a purely grace-filled teaching.



CHATURBHUJADAS

In the Lila, Chaturbhujadas is Krishna's cowlad friend 'Vishal' during the day and at night assumes a Gopi form as 'Vimala.' Chaturbhujadasji's Lila constitution is tamas, or 'obstinate,' as he appeared from Lalita Sakhi's tamas bhava.

1.

Wish for a Bhakta Son

Chaturbhujadas was born in the town of Yamunavata as the sixth son of the poet bhakta Kumbhandas. Before Chaturbhujadas was born, his father was distressed that his first five sons were so attached to worldly ways. He regretted, "I don't have a single son with whom I can share my heart."

Kumbhandas later sent those five sons away and lived only with his wife, who was also a disciple of Shri Vallabhacharya, and his niece, a great, intimate devotee of Krishna and also a follower of Shri Vallabhacharya. His niece had been married but came to live with Kumbhandas after her husband died.

After some time, Kumbhandas had another son, whom he named Krishnadas. He tended Shri Nathji's cows but did not know any kirtans, unlike his father. As is well-known from Kumbhandas' life story, Krishnadas saved one of Shri Nathji's cows by giving up his own life to a tiger that attacked them. Still, Kumbhandas held an inner desire, "I have not had a son with whom I can share all the divine



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moods of my heart and freely talk about the lilas of my Lord," and so he felt disheartened.

One day, Shri Nathji came to Parasoli and asked Kumbhandas, "You, Kumbhana! Why are you so sad?"

"Maharaj," Kumbhandas replied, "I don't have any satsang!"

Shri Nathji smiled and said, "Kumbhandas! I am the fruit of all satsang, and I chase after you! Yet still you desire good association?"

Kumbhandas replied, "Without contact with the great bhaktas, how is it possible to know the bliss of Your true form? None other than those inner bhaktas can fathom the ecstasy that resides within Your form, so without their association, one's heart cannot fully adhere to Your form."

Shri Nathji laughed and exclaimed, "Kumbhana! You are blessed. I will grant you a great devotional soul for a son with whom you can have satsang."

Even after that blessing, Kumbhandas remained despondent, wondering, "When will this son be born? After that I will have to wait until he grows up, and even then, who knows what kind of devotional bhava he will have?" Kumbhandas continued to ponder these questions until eventually, his wife became pregnant.

One day Shri Nathji appeared to Kumbhandas and said, "Come with Me!" Kumbhandas then accompanied his Lord as they went to the home of a Gopi dairymaid. This Gopi had stored her curds and butter in clay pots and hung them up high before going out to do some other work. Shri Nathji began to take curds from the jug with His hands. When His shawl suddenly came loose and fell to the ground, Shri Nathji immediately manifested two additional lower arms! He used those arms to pick up His shawl, while continuing to take curds and butter from the pots with His other two arms. Kumbhandas thus had the darshan of Lord Krishna in His *Chaturbhuja* (four-armed) form.

Chaturbhujadas



Shri Nathji and His cowlad friends feasted on all the butter, curds, and milk in that Gopi's house, and fed whatever remained to some nearby calves. Just then, the Gopi returned home and saw that Shri Nathji had eaten all her dairy products! She began to chase after Shri Nathji, trying to grab hold of Him.

All the other cowlads scattered, leaving Kumbhandas and Shri Nathji standing there. As the Gopi came closer to grab Him, Shri Nathji spit a mouthful of milk right in her face, and while her eyes were drenched with milk, Kumbhandas and Shri Nathji escaped. Shri Nathji returned to His temple, and Kumbhandas returned home to Yamunavata. While remembering this incident, he sang,

*This time she really caught Hari,
stealing and eating her curds and butter,
as He daily does.*

*The pretty Vraj maiden blocked the door;
the sound of her anklet bells startled Him.*

[Krishna considers...]

"Now how will I make it back home?"

He smashes her pots of milk and curds.

*Kumbhandas' Lord is trapped
by that Gopi's loving mood.*

*He fills His mouth with milk,
spits it into her eyes, and scrambles away.¹*

Kumbhandas sang that poem while he walked home, absorbed in the mood of the four-armed form of Lord Krishna he had just beheld. Just then, Kumbhandas' wife gave birth to their son. Kumbhandas decided, "I will call him *Chaturbhujadas*: follower of the four-armed Lord."²



That afternoon, Kumbhandas went before Shri Gusainji and prostrated to his guru. Shri Gusainji smiled and asked, "How is your new son, Chaturbhujadas?"

"Maharaj," Kumbhandas replied, "Those upon whom you shower your grace are always well and are liberated, wherever they may be."

Shri Gusainji blessed him, "Your newborn son will give you great happiness. The wish of your heart has been fulfilled."

After the conclusion of *pindaru*, the customary period of seclusion following the birth of a child, Kumbhandas took a purifying bath and then bathed his infant son and brought him before Shri Gusainji. He himself bowed to his guru and then lowered Chaturbhujadas down for Shri Gusainji to place his lotus feet upon the child's head, in a gesture of blessing. Kumbhandas then requested his guru, "Please give my son initiation into Shri Krishna's refuge."

Shri Gusainji smiled and replied, "Bring him to the temple after Shri Nathji has had His lunch, and I will give him both the initiations of refuge and dedication."³

Hearing those words, the infant Chaturbhujadas bristled with joy and laughed, to the delight of his father Kumbhandas. After Shri Nathji had enjoyed his meals and His flower garland had been ceremoniously escorted to the temple, Shri Gusainji sent all the sevaks out of the inner temple and called in Kumbhandas and Chaturbhujadas. Shri Gusainji then gave Chaturbhujadas both initiations of Shri Krishna's shelter and soul-dedication. He then offered Tulsi leaves at the lotus feet of Shri Nathji. At that moment, the infant Chaturbhujadas experienced all of Shri Krishna's lilas, and the divine form of Shri Gusainji became firmly established in his heart. Then infant Chaturbhujadas sang the following kirtan:



*Shri Gusainji, the son of Vallabhacharya
is the source of all pleasures for his followers.
My heart is filled with joy just by seeing Him,
the lila incarnation of the Supreme Being,
Shri Krishna.*

*He explains devotional philosophy
with such beautiful insight and thought,
all in exact accordance with the Lord's lilas.*

*To reject such teachings and imbibe
some other knowledge would be insane.
Mountain Holder Krishna, Son of Nanda,
grabs hold of whomever Shri Gusainji tells Him to.
Sings Chaturbhujadas, "Shri Gusainji uplifts the fallen.
His grace is all-encompassing."*

Shri Gusainji was very pleased to hear that poem. Kumbhandas was also very blissful, for he considered, "My heart's desire to have the association of a true follower of Lord Krishna has been fulfilled."

When the temple doors opened, everyone came in to have the darshan of Shri Nathji while Shri Gusainji waved the auspicious lights. After completing Shri Nathji's morning seva, Shri Gusainji took the flower garland and betel nut that had been offered to Shri Nathji and descended the Govardhan Hill. Many of the bhaktas, including Kumbhandas and Chaturbhujadas, came to visit Shri Gusainji in his baithak. Chaturbhujadas behaved like an innocent infant before the other bhaktas and remained silent. After taking his meals, Shri Gusainji graced Kumbhandas and Chaturbhujadas by giving them a plate of his leftovers with his own hand. After finishing their meals and washing up, they returned to Shri Gusainji, who gave them each their own some of his own betel nut. When Shri Gusainji went to take rest, Kumbhandas bowed to his



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guru, took his son into his arms, and returned home to Yamunavata.

Whenever they were all alone, infant Chaturbhujadas would begin to speak to his father about the divine lilas and bhavas of Shri Nathji, Shri Mahaprabhuji and Shri Gusainji. They both were filled with bliss from these discussions. If someone else came nearby, Chaturbhujadas would again act like an innocent infant.

From the day he received initiation, Chaturbhujadas would not even drink milk until he had seen Shri Nathji. He continued in this way, with his daily vow to have Shri Nathji's darshan, and eventually became five years old. Chaturbhujadas was a very accomplished soul.

2.

Chaturbhujadas joins Shri Nathji

One day Shri Nathji said, "Chaturbhujadas, join Me today when I go out to graze My cows!"

After having darshan of Shri Nathji's Rajbhog Arati that afternoon, Chaturbhujadas went and sat by the Govinda Lake. Meanwhile, Kumbhandas began asking everyone in the temple, "Where has Chaturbhujadas gone?"

They replied, "We saw him during darshan in the temple but haven't seen him since."

Continuing to speculate about the whereabouts of his son, Kumbhandas went to see Shri Gusainji in his baithak. Shri Gusainji asked, "Kumbhandas, why do you look so worried?"

"Maharaj!" Kumbhandas replied, "Chaturbhujadas was just in the temple, but now I can't find him. Where has he gone?"

"From today onwards, never worry about Chaturbhujadas. Shri Nathji invited him along to herd cows

Chaturbhujadas



in the forest. Chaturbhujadas therefore went straight to the Govinda Lake after having Shri Nathji's darshan in the temple. Shri Nathji brought Chaturbhujadas to the forest with Balaram and all His cowlad friends. In about twenty minutes they will reach the grove of Kadamba trees at Shyamdak. If you want, go straight there and you will meet them."

Kumbhandas then headed directly for Shyamdak, where he beheld Lord Krishna and all His friends sitting in a grove, surrounded in all directions by the grazing cows. Kumbhandas came forward and bowed to Shri Nathji, who smiled and said, "Kumbhandas! Come sit down."

Kumbhandas elated, "Maharaj! Today, You have showered Your grace upon my son, Chaturbhujadas. He is very fortunate." Shri Nathji did not speak any further. In this way, He began to shower His grace upon Chaturbhujadas.

3.

Dairy Theft

One day, when Shri Nathji was going out to a Vrajvasi's house to steal milk, curds and butter, He told Chaturbhujadas, "You come too!" They broke into the house, and Shri Nathji devoured all the dairy products. Suddenly, the Vrajvasi's daughter arrived and saw Chaturbhujadas. She did not see Shri Nathji. That dairymaid called out to her father, "Kumbhandas' son Chaturbhujadas has eaten all of our milk, curds and butter!"

Five or ten Vrajvasis heard the girl calling out and came running to the scene. Meanwhile, Shri Nathji and His friends ran away, for they were accomplished dairy thieves. Chaturbhujadas had come along for the first time and didn't know anything, so he simply remained standing



there. The Vrajvasis grabbed Chaturbhujadas and spanked him, warning, "If we ever catch you stealing again, we will bring your father Kumbhandas here." Then they let him go.

Later, when Chaturbhujadas caught up with Shri Nathji and His gang, they all laughed hysterically. Chaturbhujadas complained, "You took all the butter and curds, and I had to take all the beatings!"

"Why didn't you also eat any curds, milk, or butter?" Shri Nathji replied. "Then we all ran away. Why didn't you run too, instead of staying there to take their beatings?"⁴ Chaturbhujadas could not respond. He was a blessed vessel of both Shri Nathji and Shri Gusainji's grace.

4.

Kumbhandas and Chaturbhujadas compose a Poem

One night, while Kumbhandas and Chaturbhujadas were sitting together at home, they saw lights shimmering in the distance in Shri Nathji's temple. Kumbhandas then sang to his son,

*Look at the light in the window!
There Hari rests in a lofty room
filled with love paintings.*

Kumbhandas sang that line and then remained silent. Chaturbhujadas then continued:

*Beloved Krishna is making great efforts
to behold His beloved's lovely face.*

Kumbhandas was delighted to hear this and asked his son, "Have you also experienced this lila?"



Chaturbhujadas answered, "Through Shri Gusainji's grace and the intervention of Shri Mahaprabhuji, Shri Nathji has revealed this lila to me." Kumbhandas was very happy to hear his son's words. Then, full of divine mood, he completed the poem,

*Look at the light in the window!
There Hari rests in a lofty room
decorated with love paintings.
Beloved Krishna is making great efforts
to behold His beloved's lovely face.
He thrills Her by placing His arm around Her neck.
Now, She drinks the nectar of His lips.
Her body, mind and heart merge with the love of Her life,
while Her fresh form overflows with beauty.
Sings Kumbhandas, "Krishna's fortune has climaxed.
The Couple have joined into a single essence:
Youthful, enchanting, wise Radha
and forever novel Mountain-Holder Krishna."*

After singing that kirtan, Kumbhandas said, "Shri Nathji conceals nothing from you, so neither will I." From that day, Kumbhandas would discuss with his son all of Shri Krishna and Radha's intimate lilas. He kept nothing secret. So, both Kumbhandas and Chaturbhujadas were Krishna's intimate friends, recipients of grace, and accomplished souls.

5.

Shri Mahaprabhuji's Appearance Day

Once, on the occasion of Shri Mahaprabhuji's birthday, Shri Gusainji made special offerings and ornamentations for Shri Nathji exactly as were made on Shri Krishna's appearance



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day. When Chaturbhujadas had the darshan of Shri Nathji's adornment on that special day, he sang,

*Seeing enchanter Krishna's auspicious adornments,
a Gopi takes a mirror in her hand.
Showing her Beloved His reflection, she says:
"I rejoice over just a momentary glance of You.
Today, Your beauty is beyond description.
Every part of Your body is adorned
with exquisite clothes and jewels.
The resplendence of Your every limb
enchants my mind."
The Gopi, thrilled in her every pore,
has made a fragrant flower garland for her Beloved.
As she waves a shawl around her Love in celebration,
the desires of her mind and body increase.
Sings Chaturbhujadas,
"I drink the nectar of Shri Krishna's form –
My eyes are never satiated."*

Shri Gusainji was pleased to hear Chaturbhujadas sing this poem. After offering Shri Nathji His lunch, Shri Gusainji went to Govinda Lake with Chaturbhujadas and another Vaishnava to perform his daily sandhya prayers. The other Vaishnava asked Shri Gusainji, "Today, like every other day, you adorned Shri Nathji in so many ways, and allowed and revealed to us the darshan of Shri Nathji. So, why is it that Chaturbhujadas sang, 'Today, Your beauty is beyond description'?"

"Ask Chaturbhujadas," the guru replied.

"Listen," Chaturbhujadas replied, and then he sang another poem there at Govinda Lake:

*My friend! Today, tomorrow, and every day,
He is always more and more.*

Chaturbhujadas



*Behold nectar-filled Krishna,
the Mountain Holder!
His splendor is new every moment.
What poet can possibly describe
His clothes and ornaments?
An ocean of beauty arises in His every limb,
more spell-binding than a billion love gods,
with surging waves that capture
the hearts of the whole world.
Chaturbhujadas imbibes His nectar form
and remains forever in His shelter.*

Shri Gusainji looked towards Chaturbhujadas and smiled, while the other Vaishnava became more confused, "I cannot understand the subtlety of either one of Chaturbhujadas' poems!"

Shri Gusainji completed his prayers and returned to the temple, as it was time to remove Shri Nathji's lunch offerings. After Rajbhog Arati, Shri Gusainji returned to his baithak and took his meals. After everyone else had left, that Vaishnava again inquired, "Maharaj! I was not able to understand either of Chaturbhujadas' poems about Shri Nathji's ornamentation. Please remove my confusion."

Shri Gusainji explained, "Today is Shri Mahaprabhuji's appearance day, so Shri Swaminiji prepared all the offerings and ornamentation with Her own hands, to the delight of Shri Nathji. That is why Chaturbhujadas sang, 'Today Your beauty is beyond description.' The second poem which he sang by the Govinda Lake, 'Today, tomorrow, and every day, He is always more and more,' explains how the Vraj bhaktas offer new foods, clothes, and ornaments to their Beloved Krishna every day. Each moment, so many bhaktas are offering their respects to Him. Krishna fulfills the heart's



desires of each one by lovingly accepting their special offerings. That is why the Lord looks so splendid every moment."

The Vaishnava then considered, "Chaturbhujadas' fortune is truly great. Shri Nathji grants him the darshan of His all-blissful Lila." Chaturbhujadas was such a vessel of grace.

6.

The Rasa Play

Once, the leader of a 'Rasa Lila' dance performance group from the town of Anyor came to Nathdvara.⁵ Shri Gusainji and his son Shri Yadunathji were in Gokul at the time, while his other five sons, Shri Girdharji, Shri Govindarayaji, Shri Balakrishnaji, Shri Gokulnathji, and Shri Raghunathji were in Nathdvara [Shri Gusainji's seventh son, Shri Ghanshyamji had not yet been born]. The dance performer approached Shri Gokulnathji and requested repeatedly, "If you will come, we will perform the Rasa Lila dance."

Shri Gokulnathji replied, "I will let you know after I ask my older brother, Shri Girdharji."

That evening, after Shri Nathji's Shayan Arati and the seva was completed, Shri Gokulnathji asked Shri Girdharji, "If you say it is okay, I will arrange for a Rasa Lila performance. Our other brothers would like to see it, and if you can also come, that would be great."

Shri Girdharji replied, "Shri Gusainji is not here now. If he were, we would only arrange such an event after asking him. He would be displeased with me if I went ahead without telling him. Therefore, if you wish, have the Rasa Lila performed at Parasoli by the Moon Lake, but I will not be able to come."



Shri Gokulnathji then took his other brothers, as well as Chaturbhujadas and the Rasa Lila performer, and went to Parasoli by the Moon Lake. Shri Girdharji remained behind and rested for the night in Shri Gusainji's baithak. It was the full moon night of the spring month of Chaitra, and in the early evening, the group began the dance mandala. After they had danced for almost the entire night, Shri Gokulnathji told Chaturbhujadas, "Now you sing something."

"I will only sing if I see Shri Nathji Himself comes here and dances the Rasa," Chaturbhujadas replied. "Right now that true Rasa leader, our Beloved Lord, is with your eldest brother, Shri Girdharji."

Gokulnathji exclaimed, "What can I do now? If I go to invite Shri Girdharji, it will be morning by the time I return here. Besides, he may or may not even agree to come. What to do?"

"Don't worry," consoled Chaturbhujadas, "Soon, Shri Girdharji and Shri Nathji will arrive."

Meanwhile, Shri Nathji came to Shri Girdharji in his room and said, "Let's go to Parasoli at the Moon Lake for the Rasa Lila dance."

Shri Girdharji set out alone for Parasoli, and the moment he arrived, the Rasa dance performer and all of Shri Gusainji's sons beheld both Shri Girdharji and Shri Nathji Himself. Then Shri Nathji began to dance the Rasa Lila with the Gopis of Vraj. The night grew longer and the moon even more luminous. Chaturbhujadas then sang,

*Adorned in fantastic dancer's dress,
beautiful Mountain Holder Shyam,
a treasure of virtues, dances the Rasa
by the banks of the Yamuna River.*



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*Joining with multitudes of young Gopis,
they all sing in the Kedaro raga,
while Krishna puts the flute to His lips
and plays so sweetly in a scale of seven notes.
Their steps resound in a complicated rhythm:
'Ta ta ta, ta ta ta thei.'
The sounds are so subtle
that no one can fully fathom them.
Even the gods above are stunned
to behold the forest play of Chaturbhujadas' Lord.
Beholding the dalliance, the moon becomes languid
on its westward journey.⁶*

Shri Nathji then called out, "Chaturbhujadas! What now?" and Chaturbhujadas answered Him with a second song:

*Dexterous Krishna dances
with His arm around Radha's neck.
Together They rejoice and move in harmony.
Radha is endowed with all the skillful moves of dance
and Krishna is a treasure of excellence.
His melodious flute sounds sweetly.
Drenched in the loving spirit of the Rasa,
They sing in perfect time.
Sings Chaturbhujadas,
"Beholding the dance of Radha and Krishna,
the birds and deer of the forest are enraptured,
and the celestial cars are stopped in their tracks."*

Shri Nathji was delighted to hear this poem and smiled at Chaturbhujadas. The poet then considered, "I am truly fortunate." That night, Chaturbhujadas sang many such poems in praise of the Rasa Lila. Half an hour

Chaturbhujadas



before sunrise, Shri Nathji returned to His temple, and Chaturbhujadas returned to Gopalpur (Nathdvara) with Shri Girdharji. After giving the leader of the Rasa dance group an offering, Shri Gokulnathji returned home to Gopalpur with his other brothers. He remained there for some days before returning to Gokul.

When Shri Gusainji returned from Gokul to Nathdvara, Shri Girdharji told him all about the Rasa Dance at Parasoli. Shri Gusainji then said to Shri Girdharji, "We should never force Shri Nathji and cause Him to strain Himself. He makes Rasa Lila every night according to His own wish." Hearing those words, Shri Girdharji remained silent. Chaturbhujadas was a blessed follower of Shri Nathji.

7.

The Divine Couple in a Cave

One day, Shri Gusainji told Chaturbhujadas, "Go to Apsara Lake and tell Ramdas to come here. Also, collect some flowers on the way back if you come across any."

Chaturbhujadas found Ramdas at the Apsara Lake and told him, "Shri Gusainji is calling you. Quickly go to him."

As Chaturbhujadas began picking flowers, he eventually came near a cave in the Govardhan Hill. Suddenly, he beheld Shri Nathji and Shri Swaminiji, Who had just arisen and emerged from the cave. While he had this darshan, Chaturbhujadas sang,

*Beloved Radha and Krishna have spent the night
in a cave on the Govardhan Hill.
Awaking this morning, the Son of Nanda
and the Darling of Brishabhana
are drenched in the mood of love.*



The garlands on Their chests are withered.

Their ornaments are in disarray.

Radha's sari is soaked in nectar.

Krishna's lopsided turban bears the stain of Her lips.

A great splendor emanates around Them.

They come wandering, victorious in the battle of love.

Krishna, the King of elephants,

has sported with His elephant-like consort, Shri Radhe.⁷

Seeing the delight of this Couple,

Chaturbhujadas offers Them his body, wealth and heart.

Shri Nathji heard Chaturbhujadas sing that poem and then requested, "Now sing something else." The poet then began,

Krishna, Lord of the night, embraces Radha,

the clever queen of the forest bower.

The enchanting Lord of love is like a king of elephants,

victorious in passion's battle.

Soaked in sweat, He yawns.

More brilliant than the sun is Radha,

Her eyebrows like bows,

Her eyes, focused love arrows.

Chaturbhujadas' Lord, Mountain-Holder Krishna,

is a fortune of nectars.

He loves just as He pleases.

After singing those two poems, Chaturbhujadas bowed to Shri Nathji and then took the flowers back to Shri Gusainji. He bowed to his guru, who then inquired, "Where have you been all this time?"

When Chaturbhujadas told him what had happened, Shri Gusainji was delighted and blessed him, "Every day, when Shri Nathji's ornamentation is being made, come and



behold Him."⁸ From that day forward, Chaturbhujadas would come and stand before Shri Nathji having darshan while He was being adorned.

8.

Chaturbhujadas' Wife

Later, when Chaturbhujadas had grown, Shri Nathji told him, "Chaturbhujadas! Get married."

"Maharaj!" he answered, "Why must I leave this joy to undergo such trouble?"

Shri Nathji repeated His divine command, "Quickly get married!"

Chaturbhujadas followed Shri Nathji's order and was married, but his wife died after only a few days. Chaturbhujadas then entered the customary period of mourning, during which time he was not allowed into Shri Nathji's temple. This caused the poet intense separation and distress. At that time, Shri Nathji came to know Chaturbhujadas' inner heart. Afflicted with separation from his beloved Lord, Chaturbhujadas passed the days by sitting in the forest singing kirtans like these:

I love to see Krishna in the morning.

It is the supreme reward of my eyes to behold His lovely cheeks and attractive, unsteady eyes.

From head to toe, His form is unequalled, more splendid than a million love gods.

Chaturbhujadas' Lord delights in the nectar of the Rasa Dance.

To gaze upon Him is a great fortune.



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Then he sang,

*She cannot remain apart from the lovely Shyam,
the love of Her life, for one moment.
When He diverts His gaze from her,
she quivers like a fish out of water.
He is the focus of Her eyes.
Krishna's sweet smile, His sidelong glance
and rhythmic gait are all so naturally graceful.
Sings Chaturbhujadas, "A billion Cupids
cannot compare to His appearance."*

Chaturbhujadas also sang,

*In my heart, I contemplate Gopal's lotus-like face.
Not a billion suns, a billion moons
nor a billion Cupids can compare to Him.
His comely chest fills my eyes with nectar;
He is an ineffable ocean of pleasure.
Dharma, wealth, desire and liberation
all rest in His hands.
Chaturbhujadas' Lord is a Mountain Holder
and Lord of Gokul.*

Chaturbhujadas spent the rest of the days of *sutak* following his wife's death by singing many such songs to his beloved Shri Nathji. When he was finally able to undergo purification and return to the temple, Chaturbhujadas went for Shri Nathji's Shringaar darshan. He prostrated fully before Shri Nathji and then stood with folded hands. Shri Nathji then smiled at him. After the Gwal and Rajbhog darshans, Chaturbhujadas thought, 'I will return home now.' Just then, Shri Nathji called out to him, "Chaturbhujadas! Now get married again!"

Chaturbhujadas



"There are no other eligible unmarried women within my caste!" objected Chaturbhujadas.

"Get married," Shri Nathji again said. Chaturbhujadas remained silent.

For five or six days, Shri Nathji daily told Chaturbhujadas to get married again, but Chaturbhujadas could not be convinced. Then Shri Nathji told one of Shri Mahaprabhuji's Vaishnava disciples, Sadu Pande, "Find a bride for Chaturbhujadas."

Sadu Pande then encouraged Chaturbhujadas, "This is Shri Nathji's command, so you should definitely follow it!"

Chaturbhujadas replied, "Shri Nathji keeps harassing me about it. What can I do?"

Later Sadu Pande arranged Chaturbhujadas' second marriage with the widowed daughter of a local leader. Immediately following their marriage, Shri Nathji began to joke with his friends every day about Chaturbhujadas, saying, "Kumbhandas' son got married, and after his wife died, he only waited a few months before immediately getting married again! And still he is not satisfied!"

One day Chaturbhujadas heard about this and told Shri Nathji off, "You make fun of me like this every day, but You get together with women from every house in Vraj and run around with them!"

Hearing Chaturbhujadas' words, Shri Nathji became embarrassed and stopped speaking to him. Shri Nathji then went to Shri Gusainji and said, "This is how Chaturbhujadas speaks to me. Tell him never to speak to Me like that again."

When Chaturbhujadas next came to the temple for darshan, Shri Gusainji reprimanded him, "Why did you speak to Shri Nathji like that?"



"He makes fun of me every day," Chaturbhujadas defended, "so one time I also let Him have it."

Shri Gusainji rebuked him, "From now on, never speak to the Beloved Lord like that again."

From that day, even if Shri Nathji teased Chaturbhujadas, he would say nothing in return. Shri Nathji continued to joke like that, bestowing His grace upon Chaturbhujadas by saying such things, thereby giving the poet direct experience of Himself. Chaturbhujadas was a vessel of Shri Gusainji's grace and an accomplished bhakta.

9.

Shri Nathji visits Mathura

Once while Shri Gusainji was traveling outside of Vraj, Shri Nathji went to Mathura. It was spring, on the seventh day of the dark half of Phalgun. On that day, Shri Girdharji and his brothers, as well as their wives (*Bahujis*) and Shri Gusainji's daughters (*Betijis*) offered Shri Nathji everything they owned, including their house, jewelry, clothes, etc. One of Shri Gusainji's daughters, however, hid her gold toe ring and kept it to herself. Shri Nathji then said to Girdharji, "One of the Betis has kept a gift for Me. Find it and bring it to Me."

Shri Girdharji then approached the *Bahujis* and *Betijis* and said, "We are offering our house and everything else to Shri Nathji. If you are holding something back, give it up now." That *Betiji* then gave up the gold toe ring which she had kept. After that, all the ladies of the household, the *Bahujis* and *Betijis*, became very pleased and considered, 'Shri Nathji has lovingly asked for and accepted all of our personal things. We are so fortunate!'

At that time, Chaturbhujadas was at home in Yamunavata, unaware that Shri Nathji had gone to



Mathura. That afternoon he went to the temple for Shri Nathji's *Utthapan darshan*. He climbed the Hill, entered the temple, and found that Shri Nathji was not there. He began asking everyone, "Where is Shri Nathji?" The doorman and the *sevaks* then told Chaturbhujadas, "Shri Nathji has gone to Mathura."

Hearing this news, Chaturbhujadas began to experience profound separation from Shri Nathji. He sat down there on top of the Hill and sang,

*To whom can I speak of
the agony of my attachment?
Listen, my friend, about the condition of this body.
Now I can only silently reflect in my heart.
Who besides the patient can know
the pain of this disease.
Now I must endure the scorn of the world.
Sings Chaturbhujadas, "Only when I meet Him
will I find all pleasure."*

Chaturbhujadas then sang a second poem:

*Having met that enchanting Krishna and seen His face,
I have become oblivious to this body.
Friend, how can I return home?
Now who are my parents, brothers,
or even my husband's fresh love?
What of worldly shame or fear of the family?
Now I wander the forest alone.
From now on, I only say one main mantra:
'To get together with You and play!'
The nectar amassed within Chaturbhujadas' Lord
demolishes all scriptural boundaries.*



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Chaturbhujadas sang many such poems. Later, in the afternoon on the day before Lord Nrisinghji's appearance day, Chaturbhujadas climbed the Govardhan Hill. When he found out that Shri Nathji was not there, Chaturbhujadas again experienced intense separation in his heart and mind. He then sang the following poem:

*O Krishna, lovely Lad of the Govardhan Hill –
I cannot remain without You.*

*Beloved Darling of the king of Vraj,
show me Your lovely face,
Your sidelong glance and smile.*

*Without Your sight, my eyes flutter
like a fish out of water,
and every blink of an eye seems like an age.*

*O Krishna, lovely Lad of the Govardhan Hill –
I cannot remain without You.*

*O Enchanter Mohan, play melodies
with seven notes on Your flute!
Sing something delightful, lovely, and sweet.
My sweet, delectable One, speak!*

*Climb the Govardhan Hill,
loudly call out to Your cows by name,
"O Ganga! Hey Dhumari!"*

*O Krishna, lovely Lad of the Govardhan Hill –
I cannot remain without You.*

*Krishna, since the day I beheld You,
I desire nothing more.*

At night, I am sleepless.

I have left all food and drink.

*O Krishna, lovely Lad of the Govardhan Hill –
I cannot remain without You.*

Chaturbhujadas



Krishna, my eyes are burning for Your sight.

My ears long for Your words.

*My heart yearns to meet with You,
the life of my soul.*

*O Krishna, lovely Lad of the Govardhan Hill –
I cannot remain without You.*

Krishna, my heart treasures these desires.

*My eyes are steadily aimed, without blinking,
so that any moment they might see
the Beloved approaching
in the dress of an agile dancer.*

*O Krishna, lovely Lad of the Govardhan Hill –
I cannot remain without You.*

Krishna, You have pinched my heart.

*Gazing at Your full-moon face,
imbibing the nectar of Your form,*

I have become a moon bird in a sea of night lotuses.

*O Krishna, lovely Lad of the Govardhan Hill –
I cannot remain without You.*

Krishna, I've forsaken all discretion and shame.

*I have no concern for the rules of my family
or the injunctions of the Vedas.*

*Like a lotus that blossoms with the rising sun,
every moment my love grows.*

*O Krishna, lovely Lad of the Govardhan Hill –
I cannot remain without You.*

Krishna, more gorgeous than a billion love gods,

I delight in watching Your lovely stride.

Your wide lotus eyes capture women's hearts.

*O Krishna, lovely Lad of the Govardhan Hill –
I cannot remain without You.*



*Beloved Krishna, I repeat my prayer to You,
like the Chatak bird cries for its cloud.
Beloved, You are a rain-filled cloud –
now shower Your love.
O Krishna, lovely Lad of the Govardhan Hill –
I cannot remain without You.*

*Madana Gopal, Treasure of bliss,
play now in that forest cottage.
I am a Vrindavan jasmine flower,
and You are the King black bee who savors it.
O Krishna, lovely Lad of the Govardhan Hill –
I cannot remain without You.*

*Krishna, remain steadfast in every age
upon the Govardhan Hill, the abode of bliss.
Chaturbhujadas celebrates over
Shri Govardhandhara's splendorous form.
O Krishna, lovely Lad of the Govardhan Hill –
I cannot remain without You.*

After singing this poem in extreme separation, Chaturbhujadas heard the jingling bells of cows and then saw Krishna and His brother Balaram approaching, surrounded by Their cowlad friends. Chaturbhujadas approached his Lord, bowed, and inquired, "Maharaj! When will You grace me and give me Your darshan in the temple?"

"I will return to My temple tomorrow," Shri Nathji assured him, and then He disappeared. For the entire night, Chaturbhujadas sang poems of separation. That evening Shri Nathji told Shri Girdharji, "Take me back to the Govardhan Hill tomorrow morning. Shri Gusainji is returning there tomorrow. Now don't delay."



Shri Gokulnathji later suggested to Shri Girdharji, "Shri Gusainji is coming back in two or four days. It would be great if he had darshan of Shri Nathji here in our Mathura home. Let Shri Nathji reside here in Mathura for another four days."

Shri Girdharji replied, "What you say is true, but this is Shri Nathji's own wish. Therefore we must bring Him back to the Govardhan Hill tomorrow morning."

That evening, all the preparations were made for Shri Nathji's departure. About two hours before sunrise, they awoke Him and offered Mangala bhog. After the Mangala Arati lights had been waved, He was placed in a chariot. Shri Girdharji and the rest of the family then all set out together with Shri Nathji for the Govardhan Hill.

Meanwhile, Chaturbhujadas had climbed up the Govardhan Hill, and while scanning the horizon for his beloved Shri Nathji, he sang,

*Since that day, every moment passes like an age.
Friend, the day Mohan turned and smiled at me,
He cast a charm on me.*

*Now I cherish nothing else.
My hours somehow slowly pass.
I'm crushed.*

*His enticing form has seeped into my mind –
My heart is stuck on His swarthy body.
Chaturbhujadas' eyes are frantic to meet Shri Nathji.*

After finishing that poem, Chaturbhujadas saw Shri Nathji approaching in the distance. He also saw Shri Girdharji and the rest of Shri Gusainji's family and bowed to them. When they reached the temple, Shri Girdharji adorned Shri Nathji and then quickly began to prepare Shri Nathji's lunch offerings.



Later that afternoon, Shri Gusainji returned from his journey to Gujarat. Shri Girdharji and the others came to greet Shri Gusainji in his baithak. Just then, the lunch call sounded from the temple. Shri Gusainji asked his eldest son, Shri Girdharji, "Why is Shri Nathji's lunch so late today?"

Shri Girdharji explained, "Shri Govardhan Nathji just arrived from Mathura earlier this afternoon. That is why everything is running late."

Shri Gokulnathji added, "I asked brother [Girdharji] to let Shri Nathji stay in Mathura for two more days so that you could see Him residing in our house there, but he declined, so we have brought Shri Nathji back to the temple today."

Shri Gusainji then became pleased with his son Girdharji and told him, "You have read my heart. Had I returned and not found Shri Nathji in His temple, I would not have been able to bear it." Shri Gusainji immediately bathed, entered Shri Nathji temple, and began the celebration of Lord Nrisinghji's appearance day. He offered Shri Nathji's lunch and supper together. From then on, every year on Lord Nrisingh's appearance day, Shri Nathji is offered a second lunch at dinner time in honor of that day. It also became custom to sound the midday call for Shri Nathji's flower garland in the evening as well.

Chaturbhujadas was extremely elated to have Shri Nathji's darshan. After Arati, Shri Gusainji returned to his baithak, where Chaturbhujadas came and bowed to his guru and told him all about Shri Nathji's trip to Mathura.

Shri Gusainji added, "Shri Nathji is very kind and cannot bear the distress of His bhaktas."

Then Shri Gusainji took rest. Chaturbhujadas was such a vessel of Shri Nathji and Shri Gusainji's grace and an accomplished soul.



10.

Chaturbhujadas goes to Gokul

One time Shri Gokulnathji asked his father, Shri Gusainji, "With your permission, I would like to take Chaturbhujadas to Gokul."

"If Chaturbhujadas agrees, then go ahead," Shri Gusainji replied.

Shri Gokulnathji then told Chaturbhujadas, "I have some work in the town of Penta. Please come with me if you can." Chaturbhujadas came along. After they had arrived in Penta, Shri Gokulnathji said, "From here I am going to Gokul, and I don't have a personal assistant with me. Come with me and see Shri Navanita Priyaji in His temple there. Then I will bring you back here."

Shri Gokulnathji then mounted his horse, and Chaturbhujadas accompanied him to Gokul. When Shri Gusainji heard about this, he placed Shri Girdharji in charge of Shri Nathji's seva and himself rode on horseback to Gokul. He arrived in time for Utthapan, bathed and awoke Shri Navanita Priyaji.

When it came time for Shri Navanita Priyaji's Sandhya Arati that early evening, Shri Gokulnathji and Chaturbhujadas heard that Shri Gusainji had arrived in Gokul. Delighted, they went immediately to the temple. When they arrived, Shri Gusainji invited Chaturbhujadas to have the darshan of his Child Krishna, Shri Navanita Priyaji, and the poet sang,

There is a great festival in the village of Gokul.

The Gopis are transported with love.

They extol the beautiful Shyam

and call out His name again and again.

Everywhere, the praises of His Lila are being sung.

The cowpens and lanes of Gokul flow with curds.



The spectacular festival continues.

*The entire day and night pass in total bliss.
Krishna, Son of the cowherder Nanda,
pleases all and fulfills every desire
with His enchanting form.*

*Sings Chaturbhujadas,
"Mountain Holder Krishna is a treasure of bliss.
His beauty shines from head to toe."*

Next Chaturbhujadas sang,

*Mother Yashoda has let go of infant Krishna's thumb.
He staggers along, His anklet bells jingling
wherever His feet touch the ground.
Sometimes He holds onto the floor, laughs,
and then totters backward.*

*Yashoda heart is joyous to see her Child.
She caresses her auspicious and beautiful Son.
Speaking honeyed gibberish, Krishna asks for butter
and then eats it like a baby bird.*

*Chaturbhujadas observes,
"Father Nanda Baba stands by,
transfixed and elated by his Son's infant antics."⁹*

After Chaturbhujadas sang those lila-filled kirtans, Shri Gusainji was so pleased that he told him, "Chaturbhujadas! Ask whatever you want."

"You know my heart," replied Chaturbhujadas with folded hands. "Therefore, grace me with the darshan of Shri Nathji."

Shri Gusainji promised, "Tomorrow, after I have made Shri Navanita Priyaji's ornamentation and swung Him in the cradle, we will return together to Shri Nathji's temple." The poet was delighted to hear these words and



went to sleep for the night. In the morning, he came for Mangala darshan, bowed to Shri Gusainji, and sang [in the mood of Mother Yashoda],

*I rejoice over You, Navanita Priya,
Infant Krishna who loves fresh butter.
These Gopis daily rise and complain
of Your dairy thievery.
Now go and play together with brother Balaram
in the courtyard.
Watching You, my eyes are totally satisfied.
O dark and lovely one, You are the breath
and wealth of my life.
Enchanter, take whatever You desire –
dried fruit, yoghurt, foamy cow's milk froth.
Why do You go and steal from others' homes
when everything is so plentiful here?*

Chaturbhujadas continued with the following poem:

*"Every day, they come here to complain.
Those intoxicated young dairymaids tell lies and
falsely accuse my Krishna!
Those dairy pots they say He destroys –
how could my little Mohan even reach them?
See how softly he takes hold of his brother's hand
and gently feeds him.
Yet those Gopis say, 'He tore my blouse!'
and blame Him for other crimes.
They say He takes the churning sticks from their jugs
in His hand and dances in their courtyard.
When the mind is stuck to lotus-eyed Krishna,
so many things can be invented."*



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*Chaturbhujadas knows,
These are all just excuses the Gopis make
because they love to see the Mountain Holder every second.*

Chaturbhujadas sang several such poems at that time. Later, after Shri Gusainji had removed Mangala bhog, offered Shri Navanita Priyaji's ornamentation, and was swinging Him in a cradle, Chaturbhujadas sang,

*Queen Yashoda is swinging
her child Gopal in the cradle.
Gazing at His lotus face, she becomes enthralled
and sings auspicious songs.
Her divine infant has curly locks.
Yashoda has made a black dot on His forehead
and adorned Him with a necklace.
He delights in butter mixed with sugar,
which He licks from His fingers.
Sometimes He takes a toy peacock
and plays with it in various ways.
When Yashoda looks at Him, Krishna grins,
revealing two white teeth.
Then she becomes like the moon bird
in an ocean of lotuses
imbibing the nectar moon.
Sings Chaturbhujadas,
"Laughing, Yashoda embraces
Her moonlike Mountain Holder Krishna."*

Then he sang,

*As Govinda swings in the cradle,
Yashoda churns butter and elates,
"You are my bundle of joy!
"The choker around Your neck,*

Chaturbhujadas



*Your lovely dangling curls
and eyebrows capture my heart.
Beholding Your beauty every moment,
I swing You and sing of Your lilas.
Your grinning teeth, adorned with drops of milk,
are like so many jewels of pleasure.'*
Sings Chaturbhujadas,
"Mother Yashoda delights over her Infant,
the Moon of Gokul, Mountain Holder Krishna."

Shri Gusainji was delighted with these cradle poems. Afterwards, he called for his horse and rode off to Shri Nathji's temple with Chaturbhujadas. They arrived just in time for Rajbhog, so Shri Gusainji immediately bathed and then offered Shri Nathji His lunch. When the temple doors opened, Kumbhandas told his son Chaturbhujadas, "Now sing something." Chaturbhujadas sang,

*Now, nothing else will suffice,
since the day I beheld beautiful Shyam
milking cows in the cowpen.
Friend, I was on my way home,
minding my own business,
when I spied Him from the path – Madana Gopal.
I was totally stunned, dazed, unaware of worldly shame,
home, family, or my vows, friends, and parents.
Chaturbhujadas sings,
"Krishna has robbed me of my mind and body."*

After listening to this kirtan, Shri Nathji looked towards Chaturbhujadas and smiled. Chaturbhujadas bowed and remarked, "I am so fortunate to have Shri Govardhan Nathji's darshan today." Then the temple



curtain was drawn and Chaturbhujadas left the temple. His father, Kumbhandas asked him, "Where have you been?"

"Shri Gokulnathji took me to Gokul, and I have just returned with Shri Gusainji."

Kumbhandas replied, "You have fallen from grace to law."

Shri Gusainji overheard the remark from inside the temple and laughed. After Shri Nathji's temple was closed and Shri Gusainji had returned to his room, Chaturbhujadas came before his guru and asked, "Maharaj! When I told my father that I had gone to Gokul with Shri Gokulnathji, he told me that I have fallen to the lawful condition. Why does he consider Gokul to be under the influence of law?"

Shri Gusainji explained, "Kumbhandas' heart is stuck on Shri Nathji and cannot endure one second of separation from Him. For that reason, he considers all of Krishna's other lilas to be restricted by law. Actually, Krishna's infant lilas and adolescent lilas are one."¹⁰ Shri Gusainji then went to take his meals and rest. Chaturbhujadas bowed to his guru and returned home, and from that day, he never left the Govardhan Hill to go anywhere else. In this way, Shri Govardhan Nathji supremely graced Chaturbhujadas, who was a great vessel of that grace and an accomplished bhakta.

11.

Chaturbhujadas' Worldly Departure

Some days later, Shri Gusainji returned to Krishna's eternal Lila by entering into a cave in the Govardhan Hill. At that time, he gave his shawl to his eldest son, Shri Girdharji, saying, "Follow whatever Shri Nathji says, and do whatever it takes to keep Him pleased. Take care of your



brothers, Shri Nathji's sevaks, and all of the Vaishnavas. Conduct my last rites with the shawl I gave you. It is important that you do this; otherwise, people will consider not performing death rites for their own relatives. Don't worry about anything. Shri Nathji accomplishes everything."

With those final words, Shri Gusainji walked inside the cave and entered into Shri Krishna's eternal Lila with his physical body. Afterwards, Shri Girdharji, his brothers, and all the disciples experienced separation and grief that cannot even be described. Shri Girdharji eventually gathered his composure and cremated Shri Gusainji's shawl as his father had instructed. After performing all the rites according to the Vedic scriptures, observing the prescribed ten days of mourning, and completing all worldly customs as well, Shri Girdharji regained purity and returned to Shri Nathji's seva.

Chaturbhujadas was at home in Yamunavata when Shri Gusainji entered the cave and returned to the Lila. When he heard what had happened, he ran to the cave, where he fell down to the ground astonished, crying, "Maharaj! I didn't even have your darshan as you departed. Now, there is no one else in this world who I want to see. Therefore, don't keep me here any longer. Call me to you! Keep me close to your lotus feet!" With this profound separation, Chaturbhujadas then sang,

*Shri Vitthalesh (Shri Gusainji), please reside
here in Vraj again!*

*With your grace, give me your sight once more –
in that lila, and in that dress.*

*Enter the village of Gokul,
surrounded by your cows and cowlads.
You are like King Nanda,
generous and free with your fortunes.*



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*Make the path of devotion arise again!
Teach the people in this age of struggle.
Bring forth the Rasa Lila dance
in this land of the Govardhan Hill.
Without the sight of your moon-like face,
my eyes burn in agony like the moonbird's.
Provide me with the taste of nectar;
extinguish every trace of separation.
O son of Vallabh, you remove distress.
Mind, heed his teachings!
Chaturbhuj Prabhu, the four-armed Lord,¹¹
removes all afflictions of the residents of Vraj.¹²*

Chaturbhujadas sang many such poems of separation. Then, knowing of Chaturbhujadas' extreme separation, Shri Gusainji appeared in a supremely blissful form within the poet's heart and said, "Chaturbhujadas, why are you so distressed? I am always with you! Therefore, don't be so saddened in your mind. From now on, see me close to Shri Nathji. Know that I am always close to Shri Govardhan Nathji, for that is where I remain." After consoling the poet in that way, Shri Gusainji again vanished. Saturated with the bliss of his guru's form, Chaturbhujadas then sang,

*No one has ever been, nor will ever be
equal to Lord Shri Gusainji.
Such splendor was unheard of before and
will never be seen again,
for it just is not possible to recreate.
For the sake of the bhaktas,
he took human form in this age of struggle.
Who again will have the wealth of Nanda
and play like him with the residents of Vraj?*

Chaturbhujadas



*Who will be so grateful, compassionate,
and look gracefully upon his followers?
Who else will bring all the cows and cowlads
to stay in Krishna's town of Gokul?
Who will be such a pillar of dharma,
replete with knowledge and action,
and again reveal devotion in this world?
Who else could place his lotus hand on the head
of some ignoble individual
and send him to Krishna's realm of Vaikuntha?
Who can celebrate the Rasa Lila like he did?
Who else can provide such pleasures
with devotional songs and foods?
Who else will establish the honor
and essence of Shri Nathji's seva
and teach us to adorn Shri Krishna
with cloth and jewels?
Who will wave the Arati lights before Shri Nathji,
increasing the joy of love?
Who will praise the greatness
of the land of Vraj, its birds and deer?
Who will reveal, as he did, the manifest form
of Govinda, the Moon of Vrindavan?
Who will again appear upon the earth
with such charisma?
Whose great qualities, fame and lilas
will pervade the world like his?
Now everyone is anxious to see the son of Vallabh.
Chaturbhujadas prays,
"Let Shri Gusainji's remembrance
be the crown of my life."*

While singing many such poems in praise of his guru, Chaturbhujadas fixed his mind and heart upon Shri



Gusainji's lotus feet. He then left his material body, and he too entered Shri Krishna's eternal Lila. The other Vaishnavas were very saddened to witness Chaturbhujadas' departure from this world. His son, Raghodas arrived and, along with the other Vaishnavas, performed his father's last rites. Chaturbhujadas was a vessel of Shri Gusainji's grace and a great bhakta. There is no way to fully tell his story.



Shri Krishna's Temple Darshan

Mangala: Shri Krishna is awoken with the sound of a conch and bells and then offered breakfast of sweets, milk and butter. After breakfast, the temple doors are opened for darshan and the Mangala Arati lights are waved.

Shringar: After Mangala, Shri Krishna is bathed and adorned with garments and jewelry appropriate for the season. After the ornamentation is complete, a mirror is held up for Krishna to behold Himself; He sits surrounded by soft cushions, with paintings or other types of wall hangings decorating His inner temple chambers.

Gwala and Palna: During the period of Gwala, Shri Krishna is honored as a cowlad, and before going out to graze His cows with the other cowlads, He is offered the creamy froth of fresh milk. In Shri Navanita Priyaji's temple, after ornamentation is completed Child Krishna is swung in a cradle (palna).

Rajbhog: At about midday, mother Yashoda calls Krishna home for the main meal of the day, called Rajbhog. Rajbhog can also be a picnic brought out to Krishna in the forest by His beloved Gopis. Sometimes Krishna goes to a Gopi's home for Rajbhog. After the meal is served, the darshan opens, and songs are sung in praise of Shri Krishna's amazing midday lilas.



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Utthapan: Shri Krishna is awoken after a nap in the forest.

Bhog: Shri Krishna is offered fruits by the 'Pulindi' tribal women devotees. Then He prepares to herd His cows home, ending the day-long separation of His bhaktas who anxiously await His return.

Sandhya Arati: Shri Krishna returns home with His cows at this time. The blessed Lord is offered food items, and the Arati lights are waved around Him as He delights His bhaktas with His blissful presence.

Shayan: Shri Krishna is offered dinner. After the evening Arati lights are waved, Shri Krishna is put to rest. Actually, Shri Krishna never really sleeps, but resides forever playing in the Lila abode.



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Glossary of Terms

Aagya	A divine command or permission given by the guru, or the Lord Himself, to the devotee
Acharya	A learned teacher of the Vedant
Arati	The ceremonial waving of lights (cotton wicks dipped in ghee) before Krishna or the guru
Ashtakshara mantra	The eight syllable mantra; in the Path of Grace, the first initiation into Shri Krishna's shelter
Baithak	The chambers where Shri Vallabhacharya or Shri Gusainji sat to teach or meet with their disciples. These sacred "seats," found throughout India, are always marked with a Chonkar tree and are still honored today as temples to the gurus.
Betel	A nut which is ground with spices, wrapped in leaf, and eaten for flavor and digestion
Bhagavad Gita	The Upanishadic text taken from the Mahabharata which reveals the dialogue between Shri Krishna and Arjuna



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Bhagavan	The Lord, Shri Krishna, Who contains all six divine attributes of lordship, potency, fame, wisdom, renunciation, and beauty.
Bhava	Literally, 'existence,' bhava means divine mood or realization
Brahma Sambandha	The connection between the soul and the Absolute Brahman; in the Path of Grace, the mantra of second initiation and dedication to Shri Krishna
Brahman	Supreme Reality
Brahmin	A member of the priestly caste
Darshan	The auspicious sight of the guru, Krishna, or any divine being or scene; also refers to the eight times each day when Krishna can be seen in the temple
Gopis	Shri Krishna's beloved dairymaids of Vrindavan, the gurus of devotion in the Path of Grace
Granth	A teaching text
Hari	A name of Shri Krishna, He who removes what is unrelated or unnecessary to our divine relationship

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Haveli	The home-temples of Pushtimarg lineage holders, where Krishna is served
Kirtan	Songs of divine praise; the devotional act of singing such songs (from the Sanskrit <i>kirti</i> , 'to praise,')
Kshatri / Kshatriya	In the former caste system of India, the warrior caste
Kunja / Nikunja	The inner forest havens where Shri Krishna's lilas with the Gopis take place
Lila	The loving plays and pastimes of Shri Krishna
Mandir	The temple housed within a Pushtimarg Haveli, or home-temple complex
Mangala	Literally, 'auspicious,' this term also refers to the morning and Krishna's morning darshan
Manorath	Literally, the 'chariot which carries the mind-heart,' this refers to a special heart's desire one feels to make an offering or celebration for one's Lord
Pakhavaj	The classical two-headed wooden drum which is used in the Pushti Marg temple singing (Haveli Dhrupad kirtan)



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Prasad/Mahaprasad	Food which has been offered to and enjoyed by the Lord becomes prasad, which literally means 'grace.'
Pushti	Grace, and nourishment which arises through that grace
Pushti Marg	The Path of Grace, established by Shri Vallabhacharya and maintained by his descendants
Rajbhog	The main noon-time meal offered to Krishna and the darshan which opens just after Krishna has enjoyed lunch
Rasa Lila	The circular dance and associated Lilas which Krishna plays with the Gopis in the forest
Sakha	Intimate male friend (Gopa)
Sakhi	Intimate female friend (Gopi)
Sandhya	The late afternoon darshan when Krishna is welcomed home from grazing His cows in the forest
Sandhya Prayers	Ritual prayers performed daily by Brahmins
Satsang	True association; devotional company with practitioners and teachers
Seva	The loving service of Krishna, the main practice of the Path of Grace

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Sevak	One who performs Krishna's divine service, in the temple or in their own home; a disciple or follower of a particular guru
Shayan	The evening darshan just before Shri Krishna is put to rest for the night
Shri	Divine Beauty; the Goddess; a respectful title preceding sacred beings, teachers, and even towns (i.e. Shri Krishna, Shri Vallabhacharya, Shri Nathdvara)
Shri Acharyaji	Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya
Shri Gokulnathji	(1551-1640 or -1647) Fourth son of Shri Gusainji; author of the 252 <i>Vaishnavas</i> , 84 <i>Vaishnavas</i> and many other important texts in Sanskrit and Vrajhasha
Shri Gusainji	(1516-1586) Second son of Shri Vallabhacharya. He is also known by his birth name, Shri Vitthalnathji.
Shri Harirayaji:	(1590-1715) Grandson of Shri Vitthalnathji's second son and commentator on the 252 <i>Vaishnavas</i> , 84 <i>Vaishnavas</i> as well as author of "Shiksha Patra" and other texts. He is



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credited with great devotional powers and, like Shri Vallabhacharya, is also honored with the title "Mahaprabhu"

Shri Vallabhacharya	(1478-1530) The fourth and last of the great Vaishnava Acharyas. Born to a Tailanga family in the forest at Champaranya, he established the Path of Grace and is the incarnation of Shri Krishna's face.
Shrimad Bhagavatam	The Bhagavat Purana, the text which details the Lilas of Shri Krishna
Shringar	Ornamentation of Krishna with jewels and cloth, and the darshan period which opens in the temple after Krishna has been dressed
Shudra	In the former caste system of India, the caste of service
Subodhini	Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya's commentary on the Shrimad Bhagavatam
Svarupa	Literally, 'True Form,' a svarupa is a physical form of the Lord, such as the forms of Shri Krishna worshipped in the Path of Grace
Thakurji	The Lord, Shri Krishna

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Tilak	A forehead adornment, which for Pushti Marg Vaishnavas is a red U shape
Utsav	A festival celebration
Utthapan	The period of time and darshan during which Krishna awakes in the forest after taking rest
Vaishnava	A follower of Vishnu; a follower of Krishna and the Path of Grace
Vallabhkul	The lineage of direct descendants of Shri Vallabhacharya
Varta	An account or story, such as the life-accounts of Shri Gusainji's 252 and Shri Mahaprabhuji's 84 Vaishnava disciples
Vedanta	Literally, the 'end of wisdom,' these are the scriptures and philosophies which describe the nature of and path to Supreme Reality
Vraj	The land of Shri Krishna's appearance and lilas, and where Shri Nathji resided at the time of the Ashta Chaap poets. Vaishnavas often perform the 252 kilometer circumambulation of Vraj. Pilgrims walk around Vraj visiting the <i>baithaks</i> of Shri Vallabhacharya and Shri Gusainji, as well as the twelve



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forests and the lakes, all of which are associated with the lilas of Shri Krishna.

Vrajbhasha

The language of Vraj; Shri Krishna's own native language

Vrajvasi

A resident of the area of Vraj

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Footnotes

Surdas Footnotes

¹ Many people argue that Surdas was not blind from birth. Some cannot understand how a person who had never seen the material world could compose such magnificent poetry filled with visual images. However, Surdas has clearly stated in many of his poems that he was indeed blind from birth. His vision, turned inward, afforded him divine sight. The bhakta Nabhadass described Surdas:

*From his birth, he was without material eyes.
Sur saw with divine eyes and is soaked in bliss.*

² Almost a thousand years after Lord Buddha, Shri Shankaracharya was born in India. At that time, India was predominantly under Buddhist influence. Shankaracharya desired to bring the people back to Vedic Dharma, but he knew that they would not be able to understand and adapt to the theistic Vedic approach. He therefore introduced a monistic doctrine in which he taught that Supreme Brahman is without qualities, and that this world is an illusion.

Shankaracharya claimed his doctrine to be purely Vedic, but it actually ran parallel to the Buddhist teachings already prevalent in India. The people easily adopted these beliefs, and within a few years, his teachings swept the country.



Shankaracharya's tenets came under heavy attack a few hundred years later when Shri Ramanujacharya appeared and proved that Shri Shankaracharya's teachings were not purely Vedic. Ramanuja was followed by Shri Madhvacharya, Shri Nimbarkacharya, and lastly by Shri Vallabhacharya. These four teachers founded the four great devotional schools in India.

When Shri Vallabhacharya was eleven years old, he went to Vidyanagar in the south of India, then a Hindu stronghold. He successfully debated against Shri Shankaracharya's school, proving that the real import of the scriptures is devotion to the Supreme Being and that the world is real and appeared from that Supreme Being. It was at that religious conference that the title of Acharya (great religious teacher) was conferred upon Shri Vallabhacharya.

³ Ajamila was a Brahmin who left his new wife, lived with a prostitute, and made his living by killing and stealing. He had ten children by that prostitute. The youngest was named Narayana, which is one of Lord Krishna's names. When Ajamila lay on his death bed, the servants of the lord of death came to take him away. Terrified, he called out to his youngest son, Narayana, for help. The immortal Lord Narayana, hearing His own name, sent His messengers to rescue Ajamila from his precarious situation. Astonished, the servants of the lord of death asked Lord Narayana's messengers what pious deeds Ajamila had done to invoke their holy presence. They replied that he had said the Lord's name once. After that experience, Ajamila gave up his sinful life. He began worshipping the immortal Lord and eventually realized the Supreme. The Lord showered His grace upon Ajamila in order to spread the glories of the divine name.



⁴ The Sur Sagar, a collection of Sur's poetry, contains a slightly different version of this poem which contains the following few extra lines:

*I've found so much pleasure
contemplating this sect of mine.
It will increase six fold
and become a complete business...
I have great faith in You,
but I've committed such disturbing wrongs.
Take me quickly; liberate me at once,
sings Sur, the jewel of all sinners.*

⁵ Putana was a demoness who tried to kill infant Krishna by smearing poison on her breast and breastfeeding Him. Krishna, recognizing her intention, sucked away her life force, removed her ignorance, and granted her the liberation difficult for even yogis to achieve. This is the greatness of Lord Krishna's appearance: He liberates anyone who approaches Him, regardless of whether they love, hate, or even try to kill Him.

⁶ 'Sun' is one meaning of the word *Sur*.

⁷ 'Ashtakshara' is an eight syllable mantra which means, "Shri Krishna is my refuge." This mantra is still conferred by the descendants of Shri Mahaprabhuji to their disciples.

⁸ Shri Vallabhacharya received the Brahma Sambandha mantra directly from Lord Krishna at Gokul. One night, Shri Mahaprabhuji was distressed by the question of how bhaktas could experience reunion with the Lord. At that moment, Shri Krishna appeared and told him, "I will accept those to whom you give Brahma Sambandha." The Brahma Sambandha mantra is given to the followers of the Path of Grace by Shri Mahaprabhuji's descendants. It signifies the individual's marriage or joining with the Lord.



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⁹ Shri Mahaprabhuji explained to Surdas the tenth canto of the Shrimad Bhagavatam because that chapter depicts the lilas of Krishna. This divine subject was to be the topic of most of Surdas' poetry. In the tenth canto, which is considered to be Krishna's heart, He grants supreme joy to the blessed devotees of Vraj.

¹⁰ The chakai is the female ruddy goose, a female ostrich.

¹¹ Sanaka and his three brothers are celibate sages who continually wander around for the benefit of humanity, always appearing as five year olds.

¹² The lotus fears the moon, because when the moon appears at night, the lotus closes.

¹³ How fitting that Surdas first praised the festivities of Krishna's appearance, for, in fact, he was singing of the birth of Krishna within his heart and throughout his devotional world. The joy the people of Vraj experienced was also his own. He was singing not only of Krishna's appearance, but also the birth of a newly awakened Surdas. This song is still recited each year throughout India immediately after Krishna's hour of birth.

¹⁴ Shri Mahaprabhuji originally wrote *Purushottama Sahasranama*, the thousand names of Lord Krishna, for Shri Gopinathji, his eldest son. Shri Gopinathji used to recite the entire *Shrimad Bhagavatam*, which could take several days, before taking his meals. Shri Mahaprabhu then composed the thousand names of the Lord for his son, explaining that its recitation was equal to reading all the twelve cantos of the Bhagavata.

¹⁵ Daan Lila is the divine event in which Lord Krishna stops the Gopis on their way to market to sell their dairy products. He demands a tax and steals from them what could be

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translated as their dairy products, their essence, or their senses. Surdas has written many poems about this lila as well as about Maan Lila, when Shri Radha experiences annoyance in her love for Krishna and refuses to meet Him, despite many pleadings. These are among the many lilas Surdas praised in his poems which are not described in the Shrimad Bhagavatam.

¹⁶ The *svarupa* of Navanita Priyaji appeared in the Yamuna River to Shri Mahaprabhuji's disciple, a Kshatriya lady. She presented this divine form of Child Krishna to Shri Vallabhacharya, who performed His seva in the town of Gokul. Shri Navanita Priyaji currently resides in Nathdvara, Rajasthan.

¹⁷ A tiger's nail pendant is worn to ward off evil spirits.

¹⁸ Surdas was the first singer in Shri Nathji's temple. For many years, the seva of Shri Nathji was carried out in a very simple style. When Shri Mahaprabhuji's youngest son, Shri Vitthalnathji (Shri Gusainji) later organized the seva, the singing, ornamentation, food preparation and other aspects of Shri Nathji's divine worship were more elaborately performed. Eventually all eight Ashta Chaap poets sang to Shri Nathji in His temple. Four of them were disciples of Shri Mahaprabhuji: Surdas, Paramananda Das, Krishnadas, and Kumbhandas. The other four were disciples of Shri Gusainji: Govinda Swami, Chaturbhujadas, Chita Swami and Nandadas.

¹⁹ The three kinds of misery are caused by the body, the mind, and by divine forces.

²⁰ Bali, a demon king, once occupied the throne of heaven. In order to restore it to the gods, the Lord incarnated in the form of a Brahmin dwarf and begged the boon of three paces of land. Upon agreement, Hari expanded to an



enormous size and easily covered all of creation. Though He seized all of Bali's possessions through this deception, the Lord bestowed His gracious blessing on Bali, for He was pleased with Bali's total surrender.

²¹ The other four nectars are the four Vedas.

²² Kamsa was the king of Mathura who sent Putana and demons like Bakasura, Sakata, Trinavarta, Aghasura and Kesi to kill Krishna. The Divine Child made short work of all of them and awarded them liberation. In this way Krishna revealed His greatness, by showing granting His enemies spiritual rewards that even yogis have difficulty achieving.

²³ In this poem, Surdas has wonderfully described the contradictory attributes of Krishna. On one hand, He is the all-magnificent Lord, but for the devotees of Vraj, He is the Son of Nanda, the beloved of the Gopis, and dances for a glass of buttermilk. This is the Krishna Surdas adored. He is endowed with all majestic qualities yet still is childlike. While aspirants who follow the path of law worship the Lord endowed with pure majesty, Surdas, as well as other blessed bhaktas, worship Krishna as the beautiful Lad of Vrindavan. To focus one's greatness can even be an obstacle for those steeped in the mood of divine love.

²⁴ This is the order in which the poems are normally sung. First there is a poem which expresses Radha's annoyance in love towards Krishna. Her pride prevents her from seeing Her Lord. Then She is persuaded to join Krishna, and a joyful union occurs. These poems indicate Surdas' understanding that Lord Krishna craves His consort. These poems are milestones for the great poet. His realization of the divine amorous mood has now fully blossomed.



²⁵ *Sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* are the three modes of material nature which can be briefly translated as purity, activity and inertia.

²⁶ Akbar, the famous Mughal Emperor of India, lived in Agra and was very interested in Krishna worship. He visited Vrindavan disguised as a Hindu monk in order to meet the saints and eventually met with Shri Gusainji. Once his court singer, Tansen, sang before Shri Gusainji. The bhakti master then gave Tansen five hundred rupees and placed a shell on top of the money. When Tansen inquired as to the meaning of the shell, Shri Gusainji revealed, "I gave you five hundred rupees because you are Akbar's singer. Yet, when I compare your singing to that of Govinda Swami, it is worth one shell." Hearing Shri Gusainji's words, Tansen approached Govinda Swami and requested instruction. Govinda Swami would not agree to teach Tansen until he became Shri Gusainji's disciple, which he later did. Tansen then studied singing with Govinda Swami.

²⁷ The town where Shri Nathji resides is called Shri Nathdvara. At the time of these stories, it was just below His temple at the foot of the Govardhan Hill. That town is also referred to in these stories as 'Gopalpur.' When Shri Nathji relocated to Rajasthan, near Udaipur, His new town became known as Nathdvara. The previous Nathdvara by the Govardhan Hill is now more commonly known as Jatipura.

²⁸ The black bee is famous for his love of the lotus. He sucks other flowers of all their nectar and discards their pulp. When trapped inside the lotus, the black bee will not cut through its tender petals, even though he is capable of piercing wood. Once, a black bee was resting inside a lotus when night fell, and the lotus closed. Because of his great love for the lotus, rather than cut through its soft petals, he



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decided to make his way out in the morning when the lotus bloomed. That night, an elephant stepped on the lotus, trampling the black bee to death. Like the black bee has natural love for the lotus, Surdas indicates that we should have love for the lotus-like face of Shri Krishna.

²⁹ The Chataka is a type of cuckoo bird known for its love of the October rains, which is so intense that it will drink no other water except that which falls during that usually rainless month. As the Chataka has one-pointed love for the October rains, so should our love be for Shri Krishna.

³⁰ The widowed girl foolishly enters the funeral pyre, wishing to ascend to the other world with her deceased husband. We should not thoughtlessly waste this human body, because it is useful for performing Shri Krishna's seva. The only fire we should crave is the fire of devotion.

³¹ Yama is the god of death or retribution.

³² Uddhava came to Vraj to teach the Gopis yoga, but after listening to them, he realized the supremacy of their devotional love.

³³ In this poem, the Lord who is depicted as an infant swinging in a cradle is also able to take away the *maan* (annoyance in love) of women in the prime of their youth. This poem clearly expresses how Shri Krishna can support two seemingly contradictory moods at the same time. Surdas beautifully described the Divine Child and Lover within the same form.

³⁴ This poem seems to make no sense at first reading, but with closer investigation, Surdas' wisdom is revealed. The images in the poem have the following meanings: The ocean's son is the moon, which refers to Krishna's moon like face. The white swan with colored bugs on it is Krishna's

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jewel-studded hat. The 'son of curd' is butter, which is being fed to the moon (Krishna's face, or mouth). The lotus' son is Brahma, the creator, who appeared on top of a lotus. His carrier is a swan, and swans are known for eating pearls. The pearl being tasted by a parrot refers to Krishna's nose-ring. With those images, we can derive the following meaning from Surdas' poem:

*"Look at Krishna's beauty:
Above His moonlike face is a jeweled cap.
Krishna is being fed butter.
Nanda Baba, seeing that beauty, starts to laugh.
Surdas sings, 'A pearl dangles
from the end of Krishna's nose.'"*

³⁵ We have used the western name, 'Cupid' to refer to the love-god, Kamadev

³⁶ The Lord does not need any ornaments. He is always completely adorned with His own self-sufficient beauty. The waves that arise from His beautiful form fill His devotees with the highest bliss. When the Lord remembers His beloved Gopis, emotional waves surge up within His heart. His beauty, emanating like a thousand Cupids from every limb, makes Rati, the wife of the god of love, shy. Until she saw Krishna, she arrogantly thought that she was the fairest in all the worlds, but the transcendental splendor of the Lord destroyed her false ego. Only when His bhaktas' devotion becomes pure and soft as butter will the Lord laugh and delight in their company.

³⁷ This poem which Surdas sang before the grocer is called Surdas' *Sixty Lines of Renunciation*. Surdas composed three main poems on this subject. His *Twenty-five Lines of Renunciation* were sung earlier before Akbar. The third poem in this series, *One hundred Lines of Renunciation*, is not



in this text but can be found in other collections of Surdas' poetry. Surdas strongly felt that without detachment from the mundane, love for Krishna cannot arise. This corresponds with Shri Mahaprabhuji's teaching, "For growth of the seed of bhakti, renunciation, listening and singing are necessary."

In the line, "Sur, the beggar, sings by Hari's door," the poet refers to Krishna as 'Hari' to emphasize that the Lord takes away all affliction which confronts the bhakta.

³⁸ Recurring reference to Krishna's feet is found in Surdas' poems. It is customary in India to touch the feet of one's elders and gurus. To surrender to Krishna's feet or imbibe the nectar of His feet is an indication of humility. By worshipping Krishna's feet, one achieves the qualification and means to please Krishna. All the different limbs of Krishna are considered sacred, but Krishna's face and feet are most commonly referred to by Surdas and the other great poets. Worshipping Krishna's feet often indicates the devotional sentiment of accepting the Lord as one's master. Shri Mahaprabhuji says, "Through the grace of Krishna's feet, the lowest being, a snake, is made into the highest being, a bhakta...The touch of His feet is rare."

³⁹ Look at Surdas' mental condition as he was going to leave his body! Unaware of anything material, his mind and heart were fixed on the luscious sight of Shri Swaminiji and Lord Krishna, intoxicated with the nectar of each other's love. Seeing their drunken, maddened eyes, Surdas compares them to the 'Khanjana' (wagtail) bird, which is also known for its beautiful flirting eyes. Surdas' poems can always be read on several levels. Here is another meaning to this verse: Surdas, whose material body is like a bird, can no longer be captured in the cage of worldly existence. The kohl line can be compared to his life breath which holds him in his



body, without which he would fly away to return to the Lord's Lila.

Paramananda Das Footnotes

¹ During this period of his life, Paramananda Das was a Swami, a spiritual master with many disciples, and therefore signed his poems Paramananda Swami, the Lord of Supreme Bliss. After accepting Shri Mahaprabhuji as his guru, he signed most of his poems *Paramananda Das*, the follower of Supreme Bliss.

² The moon grabbed by Rahu refers to a lunar eclipse, a time of astrological disturbance which is considered impure and foreboding.

³ King Kamsa sent Krishna's uncle Akrura to Vraj to summon Krishna to participate in a wrestling match in Mathura, where he intended to kill the blessed Lord. Paramananda Das' poem refers to that time just after Krishna has left for Mathura. The poet's heart is barren, like Vraj in Krishna's absence. This feeling of separation intensified his desire for union with the Lord, which ultimately led him to his guru and Krishna realization.

⁴ Cupid here represents the worldly attraction of lust and passion. Only the highest expression of the amorous mood remains in Krishna's divine realm.

⁵ Paramananda Das, like Surdas, is known for his attraction to Krishna's childhood plays.

⁶ The Gopis behold Shri Krishna simultaneously as a lovely Infant and as their Lover. Paramananda Das composed many poems intertwining these two seemingly paradoxical devotional moods.



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⁷ "Chagan Magan" is an affectionate name for Child Krishna which means that He is perfectly filled with the six divine qualities of valor, lordship, prosperity, fame, knowledge, and renunciation.

⁸ During His incarnation as the Divine Dwarf, Krishna asked the demon king, Bali, for all the land He could traverse in three steps. Bali did not recognize his supplicator as the Lord and granted the request. Krishna then expanded to an enormous form and covered the entire creation in two steps, placing His third step on Bali's own head. Now, as Child Krishna, that same Lord is an infant on His hands and knees.

⁹ Krishna's mother, Yashoda adorns her Son with a tiger pendant to ward off the evil eye and bad omens.

¹⁰ A great, righteous king and devotee of Krishna.

¹¹ Here, two different moods are expressed. First, Krishna is worshipped in His sweet form as the divine Cowlad, Son of Yashoda, beloved of the Gopis, forever pleasing blessed devotees who follow the Path of Grace. The second Krishna is an awesome, majestic form adored by kings and seers, who come to know of His greatness through the Path of Law.

¹² This is the first poem in which we see Paramananda Das express his complete surrender to the Lord. He requests these things from the Beloved of the Gopis, for he knows they can be given only through grace. This humility allows the poet the auspicious vision of Krishna's land of Vraj.

¹³ It is interesting here that Krishna's mother, Yashoda, focuses on her Son's fame, while Paramananda Das concentrates on the sweetest aspect of Krishna. What emanates from the flute is the most desirable nectar of

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Krishna's lips, which is enjoyed by the Gopi dairymaids, the best of all bhaktas.

¹⁴ Krishna is often referred to as the moon.

¹⁵ Baten is only a few kilometers from Krishna's town of Nandagam, yet these Gopis say they will only be truly happy in Nandagam, in Krishna's immediate proximity.

¹⁶ It is very rare that a guru would give his disciples to another teacher. This is another indication of the poet's absolute surrender to Shri Mahaprabhuji.

¹⁷ Mukunda is a name of Krishna which means, 'Giver of liberation.'

¹⁸ Yamunaji is Krishna's "fourth Beloved" because She is beyond the three qualities. She is *Nirguna*, the fourth state beyond all material qualities.

¹⁹ While Lakshmi alone grants merely wealth and can only confer liberation in conjunction with Hari, Shri Yamunaji awards love of the Lord: the highest spiritual attainment.

²⁰ This is one of Mahaprabhuji's most famous writings and is memorized to this day by his followers. Mahaprabhuji praises Yamunaji, for it is through her grace that divine souls are brought to Shri Krishna. The *Shrimad Bhagavatam* describes how a group of unmarried Gopis who wanted to marry Krishna bathed in the divine river, and their wishes were fulfilled. Later, Krishna disappeared during the Rasa Lila dance and reappeared before them only when they reached the banks of the Yamuna, where they again danced and engaged in water sports with the blessed Lord. The Yamuna River has three forms. As a physical body of water, She can be seen by everyone. Her spiritual form is the purifier who transforms and uplifts Her bhaktas, making



them fit to receive Krishna's love. Her third, divine form is as Krishna's beloved consort.

²¹ After receiving the grace of Yamunaji, Paramananda Das began to praise Krishna's lilas with the Gopis. Her grace allowed him this first encounter.

²² These poems are landmarks for Paramananda Das, as they reveal that he can now relish the intimate, amorous moods of Shri Krishna.

²³ This is done to prevent bad omens or the 'evil eye' from harming Shri Krishna.

²⁴ This is certainly one of Paramananda Das' finest lines. This poem is generally sung around the time of Krishna's appearance day. Shri Krishna is not only affectionate with His bhaktas, but also instills in their hearts the great desire to meet and dally with Him.

²⁵ Paramananda Das teases his Krishna by calling Him crooked, but he means it in a divine sense. Krishna is not straightforward. He is esoteric and difficult to grasp.

²⁶ Paramananda Das calls himself the "Gopis' servant," for it is through *stri-bhava*, the mood of divine femininity, or receptivity, that Krishna is found. This is not a matter of physical gender, but rather, signifies a surrendered devotional attitude towards the Lord which can be achieved by men and women alike. It permits grace to fill the soul.

²⁷ Here, residence means not only in the physical realm of Vrindavan, but the inner spiritual realm as well.

²⁸ "*Neti, neti* – not this, not that," is how the Vedas define the Supreme without material qualities, while



Paramananda Das adores the Lord of supreme bliss, Who abounds in transcendental qualities.

²⁹ These last two poems are called *Hilag* poems, which describe how the poet's heart is stuck to Krishna.

³⁰ "Lal" is an affectionate name for Krishna which means "Lad."

³¹ The Chakor bird is the mystical "moon bird" which continually gazes at the moon.

³² Shri Krishna has two forms, one as the 'Liberator of the bhaktas,' and the other as 'Liberator of all beings.' The latter, *Sarvoddharak* divine form resides in temples, gives His darshan to all, and uplifts all beings. In special grace-filled circumstances, as in this incident with the queen, Shri Krishna's *Bhaktodharak* form emerges from out of that *Sarvoddharak* form, appearing to His personal intimate devotees and gracing them with divine experiences.

³³ It seems to me that Shri Mahaprabhu is speaking here not directly to Paramananda Das, but to the others, for he had already established the intimate mood in Paramananda Das' heart.

³⁴ The Gopis are considered to be the gurus of the Path of Grace. They have demonstrated the supreme path of Love and are the real recipients of Krishna's grace. Their devotion is unprecedented. Bhaktas strive for their devotion.

³⁵ Panchamrit Snan is a five nectar bath of milk, ghee, yoghurt, honey, and sugar. It is a traditional Vedic practice which is also incorporated into Pushti Marg svarupa seva.

³⁶ A dark paste made from sandalwood

³⁷ The flute, horn, and three different percussion instruments create the five sounds.



³⁸ Kamsa, the king of Mathura, heard a celestial voice during the wedding of his cousin, Devaki, warning him that he would die at the hands of her eighth child. After Krishna's birth, the king tried many ways to kill the divine Child and constantly thought of Krishna to the exclusion of everything else. Due to his absorption in the form of Krishna, when Krishna finally killed him, Kamsa achieved liberation.

³⁹ This gesture is made both to express joy and to ward off evil spirits.

⁴⁰ As Vishnu, Krishna rides on top of Garuda, the king of birds.

⁴¹ The auspicious mark with which women in India adorn their forehead.

Kumbhandas Footnotes

¹ A resident of Vraj

² Kumbhandas and his son, Chaturbhujadas are the only two Ashta Chaap poets native to the Govardhan Hill area of Vraj.

³ Poems of this kind, normally sung in the morning, are called *khandita*, which means 'broken.' The theme is that Krishna has broken His promise of an evening engagement, only to appear in the morning bearing the tell-tale signs of love play with another Gopi. Kumbhandas, unlike Paramananda Das and Surdas, sang such praises of Krishna's intimate lilas from the beginning of his devotional life.

⁴ This lake still exists, and a small temple has been constructed there in honor of Shri Nathji's visit.



⁵ A sweet made of toasted flour, ghee and sugar water.

⁶ Here Kumbhandas is teasing Krishna that "You, the Supreme Lord, are afraid of some Moghuls? That is like a lion being scared of a jackal – simply unheard of!" When the situation with the Moguls worsened, some fifty years after this incident, Shri Nathji relocated to Nathdvara, Rajasthan. The Moguls did in fact destroy most of the temples in the area, causing most of the saints and Krishna deities of Vraj to flee to the neighboring Hindu kingdoms, where they were offered shelter.

⁷ This type of poem is called *maan*. In these poems, Krishna's lover becomes annoyed with Krishna and refuses to meet Him. Krishna then sends a Gopi messenger to plead His case.

⁸ One of the names of Shrinathji, meaning 'Defeater of the gods.'

⁹ Indra, the god of rain, was furious when Krishna told the people of Vraj to worship the Govardhan Hill instead of him, and in a rage, he dispatched destructive rains to flood the area. Krishna protected His friends and kin by holding the Govardhan Hill above His head like an umbrella for seven days. Observing this amazing feat, Indra's pride was obliterated. He recognized Krishna as Supreme and sought His forgiveness. Some of Krishna's names derive from this lila: *Govardhandhar* and *Giridhar*, Holder of the Mountain, as well as *Govinda*, Lord of cows.

¹⁰ Indra's celestial elephant

¹¹ A name for Krishna, meaning the Lad who held the Govardhan Hill



¹² Deer are known to love the sound of the veena, a stringed instrument. Hunters therefore play the veena as a trap to lure the deer.

¹³ Shri Hita Harivamsh and Shri Haridas were two great bhakta poets who generated their own followings in Vrindavan.

¹⁴ Within this poem, Kumbhandas has exhausted all of the similes traditionally used in classical Indian literature to describe different parts of the body. The face of the moon, the eyes of the khanjan bird and deer, etc., are all considered to be the epitome of beauty, yet none of them can compare with Krishna's consort, Shri Swaminiji (Shri Radha), for Her splendor is totally divine. Of further note, this and other poems by Kumbhandas clearly disprove the misguided statements of those who think that Shri Mahaprabhuji and his followers adore only infant Krishna.

¹⁵ The full account of Gajjandhavan is found in 84 *Vaishnavas* (*Chaurasi Vaishnava ki Varta*, #13)

¹⁶ Kumbhandas' son Chaturbhujadas is also an Ashta Chaap poet.

¹⁷ *Sutak* is a period of mourning which occurs after a family member dies. The surviving relatives undergo a period of certain restrictions for up to sixteen days, during which time, for example, they are not allowed in temples.

¹⁸ Out of compassion for the poet's divine distress and separation from his Lord, Shri Gusainji broke the traditional *sutak* law and allowed a special time when he could see Shri Nathji.

¹⁹ Kulah is a fanned cloth hat and cluster of peacock feathers offered on Shri Thakurji's head on festive days.



²⁰ To have the sight of Shri Nathji in His temple and make His seva there is not a means to achieve Krishna, but rather, a supreme reward. In the Path of Grace, the means is the fruit and vice versa. This account illustrates that concept.

²¹ *Jalebis* are a soft, pretzel-shaped sweet fried in ghee and glazed with sugar water.

Krishnadas Footnotes

¹ At that time, and still today, there were many Bengali Krishna devotees and followers of Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu living at Radha Kund (Radha Lake).

² Shri Mathureshji, the seva svarupa of Padmanabhadhas referred to in this account, was brought to Shri Gusainji after Padmanabhadhasji left his body. Shri Gusainji later entrusted Shri Mathureshji (also called Shri Mathuradheesh and Mathuranathji) to his eldest son, Shri Girdharji. Shri Mathuradheesh Prabhu is therefore the 'nidhi svarupa' of the Pratham Peeth, the first house of the Pushti Marg, and is still lovingly worshipped in Kota, Rajasthan.

³ Shri Gusainji was an artist as well as musician. The elaborate seva which is performed today in Shri Nathji's temple is a continuation of the tradition Shri Gusainji established after the Bengalis were removed. In the system he developed, Shri Nathji is offered a variety of clothes and ornamentation according to the season (i.e. heavy jewelry, silk and satin cloth in the winter, pearls and light cotton cloth in summer), music in ragas suited to each time of the day, season, and festival, and foods of the highest quality, varying day to day as well as seasonally. The arts and literature flourished within Shri Gusainji's lineage and were directed towards pleasing Krishna. Every day became a festival.



⁴ The Rasa Lila which Shri Nathji dances with Shri Swaminiji and the Gopis is in a circle. This celebrated dance has many esoteric meanings. Shri Mahaprabhuji has described it as "a congregation of divine moods." It is the play in which Shri Krishna awards the Gopis the supreme reward of His divine association. We find that many of Krishnadas' poems deal with this sublime subject, as his greatest attachment was to this lila.

⁵ 'Tatathei, tatathei' are syllables which represent the beat of a drum.

⁶ These two poems are essentially commentaries on the two mantras by which Shri Mahaprabhuji and his descendents initiate souls into the Path of Grace.

⁷ In Pushti Marg seva, no one besides those directly serving Krishna should be able to see the offerings before they are offered to Him.

⁸ Shri Gusainji's *Vigyapti* is one of the greatest devotional literary works of the Path of Grace. This Sanskrit text, divided into nine sections, is rich in the mood of humility. Shri Gusainji reveals in *Vigyapti* the mood of separation from Shri Nathji. The site where Shri Gusainji composed this work, his *Viprayoga Baithak* ('seat of separation') is located at *Chandra Sarovar*, the Moon Lake, near the Govardhan Hill.

⁹ The Chataka is a mystical bird which drinks only rain drops that fall during two weeks in the autumn and forsakes all other sources of water.

¹⁰ The day on which Shri Gusainji returned to Shri Nathji's seva [Ashaad Sudi 7, which usually falls in mid-May] is still celebrated in the Pushti Marg. On that day, Krishna is adorned in red to express the excitement Shri Nathji and Shri Gusainji experienced upon their reunion.



¹¹ Vaishnavas sing this famous poem while waving the arati lights before a descendent of Shri Gusainji (the Vallabhkul Acharyas) who has graced them with a visit to their home.

Nandadas Footnotes

¹ Tulsidas is the famous saint-devotee who wrote the *Ramachitramanas*, a vernacular translation of the epic text *Ramayana* in praise of Lord Rama. Today, his work is recited throughout India. Tulsidas is considered to be the moon of Hindi literature, while Surdas is referred to as the sun.

² One of the customary practices of a disciple is to accept the leftover food from the guru. Whereas the leftovers of anyone else would be considered impure and unfit for eating, the guru's leftovers are called *adharamrit*, the 'nectar of the lips.' Taking the guru's *adharamrit* is not only a cherished reward, but also a means by which *Das bhakti*, the devotional dharma of a follower, becomes firm.

³ Although Nandadas had not yet met Shri Gusainji, he experienced divine love through Shri Yamunaji's grace. Shri Mahaprabhuji has written that, "Shri Yamunaji divinely transforms the nature of a soul." She is the mediator between the soul and blissful Krishna. It is clear in this poem that Nandadas was not lusting for the Kshatriya's wife, but rather, saw Krishna's beauty within her. His love for Krishna, which had been temporarily fixated upon the Kshatriya's wife, climaxed in poetical expression when he came to the Yamuna River. He signs the poem 'Nandadasani,' a feminine gender construction which indicates that he was singing in the ecstatic mood of a Gopi, the zenith of bhakti.

⁴ These three poems, along with one more, are Nandadas' contribution to a collection of forty-one poems in praise of



the divine river and goddess, Shri Yamunaji. The forty-one poems include four poems by each of the eight Ashta Chaap poets, four by Shri Mahaprabhuji's great great grandson, Shri Harirayaji, four by the woman saint, Gangabai, and one additional poem by Krishnadas. The following is a translation of Nandadas' fourth poem from that collection, which was not related in his varta:

*Shri Yamuna grants fortune and prosperity.
Leave your worldly things and worship graceful Yamuna
then you will find Krishna.
Associate with the great bhaktas
and imbibe their message.
Friend, remain constantly near them.
Declares Nandadas,
"Shri Yamuna always remains with those souls
upon whom Shri Vallabh has showered his grace.*

⁵ Rukmini and Padmavati were Shri Gusainji's first and second wives, and Shri Girdharji was his eldest son. It is accepted among Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya's followers that Shri Gusainji is an incarnation of Shri Nathji. Once, when Shri Vallabhacharya was before the Krishna deity Lord Vitthalnathji in Pandapur, the Lord told Shri Mahaprabhuji to marry so that He Himself could incarnate as his son. This poem in praise of Shri Gusainji was sung in the mood of servitude, which is a prerequisite for experiencing the intimate moods of friendship, parental affection, and lastly, conjugal love for Shri Krishna, a mood expressed in Nandadas' later poems.

⁶ Here again Nandadas equates Shri Gusainji with Krishna Himself.

⁷ A kirtan in praise of Shri Mahaprabhuji and then one of Shri Gusainji are sung every morning in the temple before



Shri Nathji is awakened. While serving Krishna, it is auspicious to first invoke the guru's grace. These two poems by Nandadas are frequently sung even to this day.

⁸ Shri Gokulnathji expressed in the beginning lines of Nandadas' account that he was a "very well educated" Brahmin. As a result, Nandadas draws from a reservoir of vocabulary and metaphor which is perhaps the deepest of all the Vrajbhasha poets. His poems are the most difficult to translate from Vrajbhasha into English. In the above poem, the word *rang*, which can mean color, beauty, condition, merriment, etc., depending upon the context, has been used seven times in three lines in conjunction with various prefixes. This gives the poem a rich resonance of sound and meaning. *Sohat surang durang pag kurang.lalana kesai loyan lone* are the opening words of the poem: "Glorious is his colored, striped turban. Gorgeous are the Boy's deer eyes."

A fine example of alliteration is found in the line "Kal kundala kanana kone – earrings dangling from the corner of His ears." The word *Rangarangile*, which roughly translates as "He who is colored by love," indicates that Nandadas sang here for the first time in the mood of conjugal love.

⁹ Nandadas is a master of metaphor. While other devotional poets mostly draw from the deep well of classical Indian literature, Nandadas created original ones, such as the simile found in this poem: "Krishna's pearl nose ring appears like a cluster of dew drops."

¹⁰ In the Krishna Upanishad it is described how once, when Shri Ram and Sita were walking in the Dandakaranya forest, some sages absorbed in Samadhi trance beheld Lord Ram's divine beauty and suddenly desired to be His lovers.



They approached Him and requested, "Please give us the pleasure that Your wife, Sita experiences."

The Lord explained that His current incarnation as Shri Ram was *Maryada Purushottam* – the Supreme Being under the control of scriptural law. Therefore, He had only one wife and could not breach that vow. He consoled them by promising that in His next incarnation, as Shri Krishna, He would be *Pushti Purushottam*, the Supreme Being in the grace-filled condition. At that time, He would fulfill all their wishes. Those sages were born as Gopis in Vraj during Krishna's appearance on earth and had all of their divine desires fulfilled.

¹¹ Although the name and form of Krishna are considered to be identical, there is special importance given to form. *Svarupa asakti*, attachment to Krishna's form, is looked upon as a more mature devotional state than *nam asakti*, attachment to His name. The one who knows Krishna's form always knows His name, while the reverse is not necessarily true.

¹² The name 'Vrindavan' means a forest of Tulsi (Sacred Basil) plants. Vrindavan includes not only the city of that name, but also the entire Vraj region, which is 135 kilometers in circumference.

¹³ Shri Vallabhacharya has described a progression among three stages of bhakti from love to attachment, and finally addiction to Shri Krishna. In the last stage, which Shri Gusainji attributed to Nandadas, the bhakta cannot remain without the Beloved Lord for a single moment.

¹⁴ Shri Raghunathlalji, Shri Gusainji's fifth son, composed the *Shri Namaratna Stotram*, in which he names his father, "Gobrahmana Prana-raskha-para: He who is intent upon protecting the lives of cows and Brahmins." The above



account clearly demonstrates this quality. In the *Nandadas Granthavali*, twenty-eight chapters of the poet's version of the *Shrimad Bhagavatam*'s tenth canto and the five chapters dealing with the *Rasa Lila* and *Bhramar Gita* have been published. The other sixty-seven chapters of the tenth canto are not available and were probably never recovered from the Yamuna River.

¹⁵ Shri Harirayaji wrote in his *Daan Lila* poem, "*Prakata te ras jay* – if devotional nectar is revealed, it flees."

Chita Swami Footnotes

¹ Chita Swami is believed to have been born in 1516 AD in Mathura. Nothing is known about his parents or upbringing, but the fact that Raja Birbal, Emperor Akbar's close associate, was his religious client reveals that Chita Swami must have been educated and from a prominent family. He was probably married, but nothing is known about his wife. "Chita" means intellect, the faculty of reason, and "Swami" can be translated as master. Hence, his name means "master of the mind."

² A traditional way to pay respect to a guru is to offer at his feet a coconut filled with coconut water and money.

³ When Shri Gusainji greeted him, "I have not seen you for a long time," he was referring to the thousands of births Chita Swami had been separated from Shri Krishna.

⁴ Chita Swami signs most of his poems in this way, "*Chita Swami Giridharana Shri Vitthala* – Sings Chita Swami, 'Shri Gusainji is Mountain-Holder Krishna.'" His devotion to his guru and to Shri Krishna are inseparable. Of the eight poets, only Chita Swami reminds us in almost every poem that his guru, Shri Gusainji is Krishna. Shri Gusainji was the inspiring force behind his poetic genius.



⁵ Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya and Shri Gusainji did not often impress their followers with supernatural feats, for the Lord cannot be truly understood in such a fashion. Occasionally they would demonstrate an amazing act in order to strengthen a disciple's faith. It is said that although all the supernatural powers wait at their door, the bhaktas never pay attention to them, as they are totally absorbed in the mood of loving devotion.

⁶ Krishna's father, Vasudeva had performed austerities in his previous birth and was granted the boon of having the Lord take birth as his son. Vasudeva had been imprisoned by King Kamsa at the time of Krishna's birth. Anxious to save Krishna's life, Vasudeva escaped from jail and carried his Son across the Yamuna River to Gokul, where he left the divine Infant with Nanda and Yashoda. Chita Swami states in the first line of this poem that Shri Vallabhacharya is the Son of Vasudeva, Shri Krishna himself. In the last line, frequently quoted to this day, Chita Swami proclaims the divinity of Shri Gusainji through his oneness with Shri Krishna: *tei ei ei tei, kachu na sandeh*. There are also several ancient scriptures which stated that Shri Krishna would incarnate as Vallabhacharya's son Shri Gusainji.

⁷ Birbal was one of the first Hindus to join the religious sect called Dine Ihali, created by the Muslim Emperor Akbar in 1582. Elsewhere in the text, *Shri Gusainji's 252 Vaishnava Vartas*, it is mentioned that Akbar once told his minister Birbal, "You must tell me in the next few days how I can reach to the Lord."

Birbal went to Vrindavan in search of that divine solution. He spoke with many saints but was unsatisfied with their answers. Unable to give the Emperor a proper reply, Birbal was very concerned about what sad consequences he would face. His daughter, a devout



follower of Shri Gusainji, saw her father's distress and asked him what was wrong. When he related his plight, she responded, "The solution is very easy. Go to Gokul and ask Shri Gusainji what to do."

The following day, Birbal went to Shri Gusainji and told him what the Emperor wanted to know. "I will tell him," Shri Gusainji affirmed, "but he must come here."

Birbal happily proceeded to Agra, where he told Akbar that Shri Gusainji could give him the proper answer to his question. Akbar then disguised himself and headed for Gokul alone. When he arrived, he asked the guru, "How can I find the Lord?"

Shri Gusainji replied, "If I wanted to see you, a great Emperor, I would have to pass through so many guards and ministers. Even after all that effort, I could not be sure of a personal audience with you. On the other hand, you wanted to see me and have come here, so I have easily gained your audience. It is difficult to find your way to the Lord, but if the Lord wants to see you, it becomes very simple." Hearing this, the Emperor knew he had received the answer to his question.

⁸ Kashi (Benares) is the sacred city of Shiva. One who dies in Kashi automatically achieves liberation, but Chita Swami makes clear that he is not interested in any such liberation, having already tasted the nectar of devotion.

⁹ The following account was taken from an additional source:

When Chita Swami heard that Shri Gusainji had left this world, he fell unconscious to the ground. At that time, Shri Nathji appeared to him and said, "Until now, I have appeared to you in two forms: as Krishna and as Shri



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Gusainji. Now I will let you experience Me in Shri Gusainji's seven sons." Chita Swami then beheld their divinity and sang,

*Krishna has taken on seven forms
and now plays as Shri Gusainji's seven sons.
Shri Vitthalnath appears in his Brahmin family
and blesses us with bhakti through his seven sons.
Shri Girdhar, a king of kings,
dwells in Vraj.
Shri Govinda is a moon who showers the world
with nectar beams.
Shri Bal Krishna has wide eyes.
His beauty abashes a billion love gods.
Shri Gokulnathji is filled with splendid qualities,
a treasure of compassion and mercy.
Those who have accumulated pious merit
take the shelter of Shri Raghunath,
Shri Yadunath and Shri Ghanshyam.
Says Chita Swami, "Shri Gusainji is Krishna.
By worshipping Him, everything is accomplished."*

Govinda Swami Footnotes

¹ The town of Antari was ruled by the Bharatpur king, so it could not have been very far from the Govardhan Hill. Govinda Swami is believed to have been born in 1505 A.D. We have no information about his parents. Govinda Swami had been a householder, but when he was about thirty years old, he renounced his family, went to live in Vraj, and became Shri Gusainji's follower.

² The poet must have felt that Krishna cannot be achieved through any ritual, but only through love.



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³ Performing rituals, maintaining certain scripturally prescribed codes of conduct, etc.

⁴ An older version of the 252 Vaishnavas text includes the following poem and story as well. First, it recounts that at the time of his initiation, Govinda Swami sang this poem as an offering to his guru:

*The son of Shri Vallabh is splendid in form,
peerless, beyond description.
Supreme bliss has manifested and dwells
in the town of Gokul,
bestowing felicity upon the whole world.
He grants liberation and bhakti.
He gracefully showers his love on his own souls.
Blissful, bliss form, bliss giving –
what tongue could possible explain?
'Govinda' celebrates over Shri Gusainji.*

That text also gives the following account:

Govinda Swami daily went to Mahavan, and while he sang there, Krishna would give him His darshan. Sometimes, the bhakta Madan Gopaldas would accompany the poet and write down the poems he sang. Once, Govinda Swami remarked to Shri Nathji. "Now I will now sing in a straight beat." Madan Gopaldas, who was not blessed with the vision of Krishna, inquired, "Govinda Swami, who are you talking to? No one else is here!" Govinda Swami replied, "I just babble to myself like that," and thus did not reveal his heart to Gopaldas. Another day, Shri Gusainji asked Govinda Swami, "How does Krishna sing?" "Krishna sings well," replied Govinda Swami, "but His consort, Shri Swaminiji, has an even more melodious voice. To hear Her



sing with Krishna is truly an experience." Hearing his reply, Shri Gusainji laughed.

⁵ Govinda Swami, now Govindadas, replied in this way because his position as a spiritual master (Swami) ceased the moment he became a disciple of Shri Gusainji. A bhakta in the Path of Grace does not strive for the position of guru. The gurus in the Path of Grace are descendants of Shri Vallabhacharya, so the position is purely hereditary. The title 'guru' or 'Swami' should only be given to enlightened souls who are capable of uplifting their disciples; otherwise, both guru and disciple will fall.

⁶ Shri Yamunaji has three forms: one as a material river visible to all, a second as a sacred river capable of granting devotional powers to her favored souls, and lastly, as Krishna's divine consort. According to the common expression, "*Ganga snan, Yamuna pan,*" one should bathe in the waters of the Ganges River and drink the waters of the Yamuna River.

⁷ Out of all eight Ashta Chaap poets, as well as the other Vaishnava disciples of Shri Mahaprabhuji and Shri Gusainji, Govindadas is most often depicted as being Shri Nathji's best friend. Govindadas was blessed not only with *sakha bhava*, the mood of friendship with Krishna, but also was able to experience Shri Nathji's amorous Lila. The life story of Govindadas is a perfect example of how the Lord forsakes His majestic position as the Lord of everything to enjoy the blissful association of His bhaktas.

⁸ A special state of ritual purity is maintained in the temple. Outsiders who have not bathed in a ritual way cannot enter the inner chambers under ordinary circumstances.

⁹ This account clearly indicates that Govindadas, as well as the other great Ashta Chaap poets, did not compose their



poems before singing them in front of Shri Nathji. Rather, as they gazed upon Shri Nathji's form and witnessed His infinite lilas, they spontaneously described them in verse. Govindadas' poem concluded when Shri Nathji dashed away, which testifies to the inspired nature of the poet's lyrics. Shri Gusainji composed the final verse and signed the poem, 'Jana Govinda,' which I have translated as 'Govinda's people.' The Hindi word *jana* (people) can also be broken down into *ja*: to be born, and *na*: not. Thus, Govinda's people are actually "those who will not have to take birth again."

¹⁰ This custom is still maintained in Shri Nathji's temple as well as other Pushti Marg temples. Before the morning and evening periods of worship, a conch is blown three times, followed by a few minutes' pause to allow Krishna enough time to return before the temple doors are opened.

¹¹ Govindadas felt that only Shri Nathji should enjoy his singing. When the Muslim took pleasure in his rendition of that raga, in Govindadas' mind it became unfit to be offered, for everything should be offered first to the Lord before being enjoyed. This account should not be taken to indicate prejudice against Muslims, for there have been many Muslims accepted into the Path of Grace, such as Shri Gusainji's disciple Rasakhan.

¹² Govindadas specifically mentions that his turban is made of sixteen pieces. Therefore it can be understood to be a form of Shri Krishna, who, as the full incarnation of the Supreme Being, possesses all sixteen divine attributes.

¹³ The greatness of Govindadas' singing is also revealed in the story of Tansen, Emperor Akbar's famous court singer. Once Tansen performed for Shri Gusainji. Afterwards, Shri Gusainji offered him five hundred rupees and placed a sea



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shell on top of the money. When Tansen asked, "Why did you give me a shell?" Shri Gusainji explained, "I have given you five hundred rupees because you are Akbar's court singer, but when I heard your singing, I gave you the shell." Tansen protested, "Only if you let me hear something greater will I know that your evaluation of me is correct." Shri Gusainji then asked Govindadas to sing, and after hearing him, Tansen was astonished and humbly conceded, "It's true; the difference between Govindadas' singing and mine is like that of fine cotton compared to coarse burlap." Tansen then requested Govindadas to teach him to sing, which he agreed to only after the court singer became Shri Gusainji's disciple [Refer to Tansen's life story: varta #113 in 252 *Vaishnavas*, Part 2].

¹⁴ The worship in Shri Keshorayaji's temple was of a different style than the seva carried out in Shri Gusainji's temples. *Maryada* style temple worship is governed by scripture, law, and mantra, whereas the *Pushti* seva Shri Gusainji taught is always performed with Shri Krishna's pleasure in mind. Therefore, seva is adjusted according to the seasons, while still incorporating many of the same scriptural elements found in *Maryada* worship. In *Maryada*, deity worship is considered to be a means to an end, while in *Pushti* seva, Krishna's worship is the means as well as the reward. Govindadas asked Shri Keshorayaji if He was alright, because the poet was accustomed to the sensitive aesthetics of Shri Nathji's temple seva, where during the hot season, Shri Nathji is adorned with light, pearl ornaments, thin cotton cloth, and surrounded by water fountains.

¹⁵ It is a tradition in India that one should not take anything from the guru or the guru's family.

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¹⁶ As Shri Gusainji was about to leave his body, he took Govindadas by the arm, and they walked together into a cave on the Govardhan Hill at the Sundar Shila in Nathdvara (now Jatipura). They both entered into Krishna's eternal Lila with their material bodies.

Chaturbhujadas Footnotes

¹ How fortunate that Vraj maiden was to directly receive the nectar from Krishna's mouth! In lilas like these, Krishna showered His grace upon the residents of Vraj by acting like a mischievous child.

² Some people feel that Krishna's four-armed form contains two of His own arms and two of His consort's. Also, His four arms represent the four Gopis, Shri Swaminiji, Shri Yamunaji, Shri Kumarika, and Shri Chandravali. Shri Mathureshji, Shri Kalyanrayaji, Shri Dwarkanathji, and Shri Gokulnathji are the four main four-armed Krishna svarupas worshipped in the Path of Grace.

³ The second initiation of dedication to Shri Krishna is not usually given to infants, as they do not have the awareness to comprehend the initiation.

⁴ Shri Krishna's episodes of stealing dairy products from the Gopis earned Him the name, "Makhan Chor – the Butter Thief." These acts of thievery were not undertaken to deprive the Gopis of their livelihood; Krishna had thousands of cows of His own and they yielded ample milk products. Rather, His intention was to grace them with His blissful presence.

⁵ The Rasa Lila is popularly depicted in India and performed as a traditional circular dance by traveling theatre troupes. They enact not only the Rasa Lila, but many of Shri Krishna's other lilas. These troupes are comprised of Vrajvasi Brahmin



boys who are taught at an early age to dance, sing classical Indian ragas, and enact the various plays of Lord Krishna. During the performance of one of the first Rasa dance troupes, the boy who was playing Krishna became so engrossed in the spirit of Krishna's Lila that he actually merged into the Lila and never returned to this world. When these young boys wear the ornaments of Krishna and the Gopis, they are considered to be divine and are bowed to and worshipped. To this day, there are many Rasa Lila dance groups in the Vrindavan area, and some travel throughout India and even abroad.

⁶ As described in the sacred literature, Shri Krishna's Rasa Lila dance took place during the course of a single night, but the moon and the stars slowed their pace in order to lengthen that one night to six months.

⁷ Elephants are considered to be the most adept of all animals in love sports.

⁸ This was a rare honor which Shri Gusainji allowed Chaturbhujadas, for otherwise no one is allowed to see Shri Nathji while He is being adorned.

⁹ This is the first song Chaturbhujadas sang about the scene of Krishna's birth and childhood. All of his previous poems praised Shri Nathji, the form of Krishna as an adolescent Lover. By simply coming to Gokul, Shri Krishna's birthplace, he seems to have been initiated into the joy of Krishna's birthday celebrations.

¹⁰ Many scholars who have written on the Path of Grace have mistakenly commented that Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya's path was focused only on Shri Krishna's infant and childhood lilas. This account shows that, for many Pushti bhaktas, the conjugal Lila was supreme.



According to Shri Mahaprabhuji's teachings, the Rasa Lila is the height of devotion.

¹¹ Here, the poet's signature, 'Chaturbhuja' refers not to himself but to Lord Krishna, the four-armed Lord.

¹² It is mentioned in several scriptures that Lord Krishna would manifest as Shri Vitthalnathji (Shri Gusainji). This poem reveals that Chaturbhujadas, as well as many others, viewed his guru as Krishna Himself.

